To Robert Davidson Esq.

from his friend

July 1st 1840 Geo. Webster

THE

CATHOLIC SPIRIT

OF

TRUE RELIGION.

"For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ."—1 Cor. xiii. 12.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR SCOTT, WEBSTER, AND GEARY,
CHARTER-HOUSE SQUARE.
MDCCCXL.

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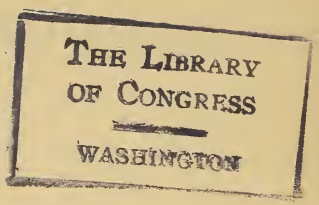

PRINTED BY NEILL AND CO. OLD FISHMARKET, EDINBURGH.

PREFACE.

The main argument of this work is to prove, that whatever the ecclesiastical order which may prevail in the Millennium, yet, in reference to the present epoch,—not an outward uniformity over all (as the Church of Rome contends for), but an unity of spirit in variety of forms (as in the churches of the Reformation), is a constitution of the Catholic Church answerable to the light of reason, of sacred history, and of Scripture;—that, in keeping with this state of things, religious men of every evangelical denomination are called upon as disciples of Jesus Christ, and the Redeemed of the Lord, to entertain towards each other, and the communions they severally belong to, feelings of mutual recognition and esteem; and thus to seek to arrive at truth and ultimate unity over all, through the medium of mutual love in Christ Jesus.

A friendly Churchman to whom this was stated, said, on hearing it, that he inferred, from the attempt to advocate such a theme, that the Author was a Dissenter; and that no doubt it was a work of the same order as several others which had lately appeared in this country, which, though they professed to maintain a truly catholic spirit, yet were in reality written in the interest of dissent. He also expressed himself at a loss to understand what was meant by "The Churches of the Reformation."

To this it was replied, that the Author, though he desired to keep all things personal "to himself before God," even to the suppression of his name, was no Dissenter; that it would be found, on perusal, that his work was not written in the interest of dissent; and that, with regard to the expression objected to, he spoke of *the Churches of the Reformation*, in contrast with *the Church of Rome*, for the same reasons as

oblige us all to speak of *the States of Modern Europe*, in contrast with *the Roman Empire*. The volume itself was at the same time opened at page 221, and the more full development of this idea, which is given there, was read. "I see what you mean," was the reply; but still the good Churchman would not say Amen. This taught the Author that his theme will meet with objections where he would wish it most to be received at once. Believing, as he most firmly does, however, that intelligent Christians generally, whether Churchmen or Dissenters, will come at last to the conclusion which he has himself arrived at, after an education which prepossessed him in favour of more stringent views of the constitution of the visible church, he "casts his bread upon the waters," happy with the thought of bearing such a testimony at such a moment; and though deeply sensible of the many imperfections of his work, and shrinking altogether from the criticism of the mere dogmatist, yet trusting confidently in the communion and sympathy of the pious, and of all who duly feel that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy, in the Holy Ghost.

As a work to which he owes much (though he of course also differs from it much), the Author begs to refer to the "Introduction à l'Histoire Universelle," of M. MICHELET—a tract in which the finest generalities of historic truth are treated with such poetic feeling as to leave the impression on the reader, when he has perused it, that he has awoke from a beautiful dream. He begs also to notice a work entitled "Religious Dissensions, their Cause and Cure, a prize essay, by PHARCELLUS CHURCH, author of the Philosophy of Benevolence, New York, 1838," a volume full of thought. It will be found, on perusal, that the resemblance between the work now in the reader's hands, and that most cogent one on a branch of the same subject, lately published by Dr NOLAN, lies in the title only.

LONDON, *November* 1839.

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PART I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE OCCASION.

THE APOLOGY.

THE MANNER.

THE IDEA.

THE TITLE.

THE OCCASION.

THERE are in our country, at the present moment, a great many devotedly religious persons, who are very exclusive in their religious views; and their numbers are daily increasing. There are also a great many others who have no toleration for these exclusives. Thus, exclusiveness on the one hand, is met by intolerance on the other. Coldness, or else mutual recrimination follows. And very many who are noted by the world for their religiousness, exhibit to the world, instead of the fruits of the Spirit, only unsocial feelings, or angry passions. Instead of "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,"* they exhibit moroseness, contention, haste, anger, in a word, all the opposites of the Christian graces.

Our blessed Saviour said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one toward another."† He gave to the world mutual love among his followers, as the criterion of true discipleship. But his words are disregarded. The many in the church, just like the many in the world, love each other only when they happen to be of the same society or party. Wherever there are differences, then, in the church, just as in the world, there are contentions. Are we to wonder, then, if the world, not caring to inquire into the merits of religious questions, but always quick to observe faults

* Gal. v. 22. † John xiii. 35.

among those who profess to be religious, should form hard judgments of religion itself, which appears to them to be the cause of such perversion of the social affections, and of such disturbance of society? Are we to wonder if the world should wish to attenuate, or even at once to extinguish, religion? No. The world has good ground to stand upon when it condemns those whose conduct and profession accord so ill. The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. They feel they are safe in resisting the religion which bears such bitter fruits. They know that it cannot be the true religion which actuates the contentious man; and hence their power. And hence the severity of those stripes by which the self-dividing and self-consuming church is now chastised by the world, which has always been united against it, but never was so strong before.

"All the law," says St Paul, "is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."* Such is the code of Christian morality. And this is all. How heavenly in itself! How congenial to the warm and grateful heart to keep it! But how went it with the keeping of this law, even in the Apostles' days? "If ye bite and devour one another (the Apostle adds), take heed lest ye be consumed of one another."† And how goes it with the keeping of this law in the present day? Have not we as much need to take heed as the first Christians had? Have we not more? We have not, like them, supernatural endowments amongst us to keep us together, and to enable us to make head against the world, and to convince it. In our case every thing depends on our Christianity. Inspired guidance has ceased. Miracles have been withdrawn; and if charity fail, what will become of us? Plainly, in that case, we cease to be of the Church of Christ; for, in the Church of Christ,

* Gal. v. 14. † Gal. v. 15.

charity never faileth.* "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; and when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." But charity never faileth.

Now, looking around us, is not one unwarrantably exclusive, and another unwarrantably intolerant of the exclusiveness of the first (let me not say of his own exclusion)? Well, then,—why this on either hand? Is it that we ought to "contend,"—that we ought "to strive for the faith of the Gospel." Good. Only let it be against the "adversaries" of the Gospel, and in the way which the apostle commands, when, in this one instance, he speaks favourably of striving, that is, let all of us, "standing fast in one spirit, with one mind, strive together."† Or is it in general terms that we must maintain truth, oppose error, and preserve communion and religious intercourse pure, because this alone is true Christian wisdom, this alone the wisdom that is from above? Good again. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, and full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."‡ It is first pure. But, trusting that this refers to doctrines, how, let me ask, is this purity to be sought and exemplified? The apostle informs us in the next clause. "The fruit of righteousness," says he, "*is sown in peace.*" And would but all those who love righteousness and truth, instead of indulging in the irascible movements of Self, mistaking them for holy zeal, only mark this characteristic of heavenly wisdom, and in the terms of it, begin to sow in peace henceforth—Oh, then, what a beautiful spring-time in the church! what a blessed revival of

* 1 Cor. xiii. 8. † Phil. i. 27. ‡ James iii. 17.

primitive Christianity! how soon would many a field be white unto a rich harvest of the fruits of the Spirit!

Let us then begin at once with the endeavour to sow in peace. Let us calmly ask, in the interest of those who are exclusive, whether this so-called exclusiveness really be a fault,—and granting it is found to be so, still, whether it ought to be charged at the outset, I need not say with intolerance (for that never can be right, when directed towards those who are sincerely convinced of the truth of what they believe), but with severity against those who have fallen into this state of religious feeling? Since persons acknowledged to be devotedly religious are exclusive, is there not evidence for concluding either that such exclusiveness is actually a right thing in itself, or else that, if it be a wrong thing, still it is such a thing as can so transform itself into the semblance of a right thing, as to be taken for such by good men? And, even supposing the latter alternative to be true, ought not respectful argument, rather than mere denunciation, to be the way in which the evil should be met?

Let us not begin then merely by denouncing exclusiveness, as many who are pious, and not otherwise blameworthy, often do. Let us inquire calmly and in a Christian spirit, whether this exclusive temper, which is apt to gain possession of many religious persons, and even to increase as they increase in religious devotedness, be actually a right thing as they think, or only the semblance of it,—whether it be really an element in the spirit of holiness as they judge, or, on the contrary, only a shadow cast in the soul by a religious light, which is admitted only in one direction, and too much in the form of seclusive devotional feeling. Certain it is, that under partial lights, shadows must form. Nay, the more intense the light in such a case, just so much darker must be the shadow also. The fact, therefore, that very ex-

clusive views and feelings are often found associated with very devotional feelings, nay, the consciousness in my own experience, that while I am becoming more devout, I am also growing more exclusive, is no sufficient evidence either from without or from within, that exclusiveness is a right thing. On the contrary, it may be nothing better after all than SELF rising in the shadow, which a beam of religious light has cast in my soul, and mistaking its own native feelings of pride or of self-righteousness, for the spirit of holiness, because there is a religious halo around them.

But of this hereafter. Meantime, let us remark, that whatever the true character of this exclusiveness, it defines in a very marked manner the conduct of those who are under its influence. Instead of breathing a truly catholic spirit (which is it not one of the best evidences of the supremacy of true religion in the soul?), they feel as if called upon by conscience, and the spirit of holiness, to stand aloof from other Christians, and to limit the outgoings of their charities, and all Christian co-operation, to the circle of their own communion. That alone they regard as trust-worthy, and on every scheme, however Christian in its aspect or profession, they look with suspicion, or positively denounce, if it but originate in another. They have a good conscience in resisting, and they plead "principle" for it. But in standing out upon a lesser principle, do we not often compromise a greater? This needs to be considered. And though they pray and haply sigh for the day when all religious differences shall merge in the unity of the church, and when all who bear the name of Christ shall freely open their hearts to one another; yet unhappily they remove that day so far into the future, as to deem it not to be thought of now; and meantime entertain such isolating and unsocial feelings in religion, and such stringent views

of the constitution of the visible Church, that one would think, were he to form his opinion of Christianity from their views of it, that its watchword was "exclude," and the first line of the Church's rubric, "make fast the doors." Thus,—conscientiously no doubt, but just so much the more effectively,—do thousands of devotedly religious persons spend their lives and energies chiefly in repelling others from Christ, and resisting every scheme, whether of Christian philanthropy, or of Christian communion, which proposes to be in any degree catholic.

It is not when we look to the Church of Rome merely (alas! nothing can be expected from her in this respect), but, whether we look to the Church of England or of Scotland, or to any of the dissenting bodies,—whether we mark the Episcopalian, the Presbyterian, or the Independent, we equally discover the prevalence of this way of feeling among many of the most devoted of their respective memberships. Not but almost all are the advocates, in words at least, of a catholic spirit; not but almost all sincerely desire, and many in each society earnestly pray for, the unity of the church, and a catholic communion, in spirit at least. But still the views of almost all are such, that almost all refrain from making any actual movement that way; nay, even resist such a movement when it is made by others. Certain prepossessions, so deeply seated in the breast that they conceal themselves in the very chambers of conscience, and are thus mistaken in their outgoings for the dictates of that judge (to whom every one feels that a rightful supremacy belongs), so impede the movements of evangelical truth in their breasts, that though they be moved by religious feelings, yet, like the movements of a watch whose balance-wheel has been magnetized, their hearts do not beat freely with a widely embracing sweep, but only turn and return, in short and hurried vibrations,

round the congenial point of their own connection or church theory.

Meantime the dishonour that is put on the Redeemer, and the miseries which are falling upon the world and our countrymen, through want of a catholic spirit, and the Christian co-operation and unity which belong to it, are truly fearful. Thus, at a distance, how feebly is the grand duty of teaching the Gospel to every creature, our Saviour's last command, carried on, compared with what it ought to be, compared with what it might be, were all Christians but united in the blessed work! And yet, the little that is done, how painful to contemplate it! The Gospel,—the religion of the God of love,—the religion that was heralded by an angelic voice of Peace on earth, and good will towards men,—the religion which bears the name of Him who, on the last night of his agonies, prayed and prayed again* for his followers, that they all might be one, that the world might believe that the God of love had sent Him; the Gospel spread abroad in the form of rival sects, how painful the thought! No doubt, those who have devoted themselves to the missionary enterprise, when they find themselves out in the world, and in active conflict with Satan, as their calling requires them to be, are generally drawn nearer to God than they were when at home; and hence such new enlargement of heart, that when they meet each other, it is with warm feelings of brotherhood which they never knew before. Truly refreshing it is to see how fully it is in the hearts of missionaries to love each other unfeignedly; and to forget, as if left behind in the land they have left, the sectarian distinctions in which they were bred. Still, too often, each is required by the sect which sends him, to maintain its denomination; and were Asia to be impressed now with such religion as we are sending her, what have we to expect,

* John xvii. 11 and 21.

but that, after a few generations, just as in America at the present moment in consequence of the sectarianism of the original settlers, the various rival denominations now planted in the East would develope themselves into as many rival sects as exist already in the West, by whose polemics the infant church would be torn to pieces, and the fruits of the Spirit be nipt in the bud. Let not these remarks, however, be viewed as an argument against missions, but solely as a motive to union among the friends of missions. The missionary cause is the noblest enterprise of the times, and no consideration ought to be allowed to impede it. But ought not the painful prospect just given to urge its friends to co-operation and Christian unity?

But to see the evils of our present contentions and our present divided state, we need not look so far away. We need only look around us. For everywhere is infidelity lifting its cheerless head, invested with fearful moral energy by the fact, that though, in precept, ours be a religion of humble-mindedness and mutual forbearance, yet in practice, nowhere in the wide world—not between any classes of worldly men—are stronger antipathies, and more unsparing judgments pronounced, than those which reciprocate between religious men if they but happen to belong to different religious parties or societies. And this in the churches of the Reformation too!

And while, through these discords in the bosom of these churches—churches which claim to have emancipated themselves from the ignorance and errors into which the Church, along with every other social institution, had fallen during the darkness and barbarism of the middle ages, and to have availed themselves of all the lights which have arisen in Europe since the revival of learning—infidelity is invested with such powers to speak against religion as a whole, the priesthood of the Church of Rome

is, from the same cause, enabled to speak with peculiar emphasis against the Reformation. And, in truth, though it be easy to shew that there have been as many differences among the learned of the Romish communion, as there ever have been among Protestants, and, indeed, that the unity of the Church of Rome (viewed in reference to the many at least) is an agreement in externals merely (one might almost say in ignorance merely), still, so long as the Romish priesthood are able to maintain any semblance of a general agreement at all, and to hold up our dissentions in contrast with their unity, they will not speak in vain. For even to a person who knows no more of Christianity than the general idea implied in the term Christian, as that term is used by the world, (and who, consequently, knows that a Christian's characteristics ought to be meekness, forbearance, love)—to the merest observer, almost anything that will bear the name of unity seems better and more Christian than discord and contention. And therefore every dispute between ministers of the Gospel gives advantage to the Romish priest, every schism among Protestants gives new strength to popery.

Nor is this the only point of view in which our contentions are ruining our churches. So mighty to accomplish any object which it proposes is a great secret society, especially when so completely centralized as the church of Rome, compared with that of loosely constituted societies, such as the evangelical churches, that nothing, I believe, but the sovereign power of evangelical love among the reformed, uniting them in the bonds of brotherly affection, and witnessing to the world that we are true Christians, will ever enable us to maintain our ground against a priesthood, who, though consisting of many thousands, are yet so united, that, as if they were but one man, they all whisper simultaneously into the

ears of the listening millions the same views and sentiments. Yes! if we will not learn to love one another as our Saviour gave us commandment, the Reformation may be quenched still. Popery may be over all again. Is it not on the way?

This is bad enough: but yet it is not the worst. For in the church of Rome, salvation is possible. Though the eye of the worshipper rest on the crucifix, and his faith on the mass, and he be taught to believe that all is well when all is arranged with the priest, still the redeemed soul, under the discipline of the Holy Spirit, can substitute the true cross for the crucifix, and the Saviour and his sacrifice (offered once for all*) for the priest and the host. The path to which the church of Rome tries to confine the worshipper, tortuous though it be, does not so bewilder the true Catholic, but he finds his way to the New Jerusalem notwithstanding. And lamentable though it be to contribute to a revival, in the nineteenth century, of such grievous errors and spiritual despotism,—so much of the middle ages in short,—as the unreformed church still carries in her bosom, yet our differences in religion are causing greater evils still. Of popery, the fruits are indeed bitter; but of impiety, the fruit is only ashes. And why, in every large town throughout our land, is the tide of popular impiety and ignorance of sacred things rising so fast, and flowing on in so full a stream, altogether unstemmed, and only diverted here and there into a few eddies, where a spirit of holy enterprise happens to circulate at the time? And why, in our rural districts everywhere, are our peasantry falling so fast away from the piety of their forefathers, and adding a deeper ignorance to the lately-acquired wickedness which has crept among them from the town's people? And why is many a naturally amiable heart so

* Heb. x. 12.

benighted and estranged from the love of God, that even a desolating atheism, under the engaging name of Socialism, is gaining many such for proselytes? And why are many statesmen and others, to whom the name of philanthropists cannot be denied, not ashamed to contend that, in the organizing of universities, schools, mechanics' institutions, and the like, religion should be excluded? How could such a dreadful idea as the excluding from education the knowledge of the God who made us, and of the laws and of the alone salvation he has given us, be entertained, even for a moment, by a mind possessing any right power of judging at all? And why is the moral influence of the church and the clergy sunk so low, that the very idea of spiritual authority is treated as ridiculous; and almost every hearer now is in the attitude of a judge, and not of a doer? Why all these evils? Oh! it is all because of schism,—all because the once glorious tide of the religious energy of England is now become stagnant with disputes, is now spent in the self-destroying form of mere antagonism and reciprocal denunciation.

And how do the clergy feel in the midst of all this? The clergy alas!—But on this subject, let one who does not belong to the order declare the truth. "Surely" (says the author of the Natural History of Enthusiasm) "those must have a faint sense of their responsibility, who can think themselves free to indulge their resentments, and entertain their prejudices, and to adhere to their bigotry, at the peril of the salvation of mankind. Yet it is the factions, the jealousy, the animosities of the ministers of Christianity, that, at the present moment, is sealing the perdition of the world. It is this that is condemning the millions of our British population to ignorance and atheism; it is this that is snatching from us the lately entertained hope of the conversion of Mohammedans and Pagans; it is this that is scattering the sighs

and prayers of the church for the prevalence of truth and goodness; it is this—it is the disgraceful, the groundless, and the obstinate discords of the ministers of religion—that now baffles the benevolence of heaven, and throws the wretched human family forward upon another cycle of Satanic illusion. The methods of the Divine government, inscrutable as they are for the most part, yet make themselves legible, very often, in the retributions they involve: so it may prove in the present instance. Every sort of motive and incidental advantage has, during the current period, combined to invite a reconsideration and abandonment of our hereditary religious divisions: this has been the Lord's special call to his ministers of the present age. But it has not been listened to; it has been heard and contemned. Yet the guilty will go in peace to their graves, and the public punishment be reserved to descend with ruin upon the heads of their less culpable successors. Let it be believed that in the actual tendency of opinions throughout Europe, the clerical institute and order is altogether in jeopardy. Weakened a little more, and disgraced a little more by internal discords, and it may be trampled under foot by its adversaries. . . . . The part of the junior members of the clerical order (of all communions) is to convince themselves of the error of their fathers in this behalf, and to resolve, that, so soon as they come upon the stage of public life, they will remove the unwarrantable and pernicious discords that have so long stayed the course of Christianity, and brought its ministers into contempt. Union, if once cordially intended and promoted, would not be obstructed by any serious obstacles; the difficulties that stand in the way would appear to be what they are, trivial pretexts only, or misunderstandings, which good sense and charity would presently surmount. So far as the present pleas of faction

are of a political kind, they must at once be condemned as impiously criminal; so far as they relate to diversities of usage or opinion in worship and government, a better understood principle of church polity and communion, together with that sentiment of love and forbearance which the Gospel supplies and demands, would secure to every man his personal persuasion, without allowing him to break company with his brethren; and so far as our parties take their origin from theological disagreements, a pious and diligent prosecution of biblical interpretation, such as is at present in progress—biblical interpretation opposed to the dialectic and the metaphysic method of compacting systems, would soon bring into substantial accordance all sincere men. In one word, a restored manliness of feeling among religious folks,—a renovated good sense,—and, above all, an invigorated piety and profound conviction of the truth of the religion we profess, would dispel as in an instant the shame and folly of our factions."* The author goes on to say, that the above-named heavy disparagements under which the influence of the ministers of religion is at present labouring, attach in common and nearly in equal degrees to the clergy of all parties. It may be thought that the language he uses is very strong, yet we have only to look around, in order to see that no language can be too strong. The present aspect of the Church in respect of catholicity of spirit and of unity is truly distressing. In the Word of God the Church is typified by a holy mountain, where the wolf dwells with the lamb, and the leopard lies down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child leads them; and there is nothing over all to hurt or to destroy.† But for a type of the distracted Church, as we see it around us, we must close the blessed page of Isaiah, and turn to

* Spiritual Despotism, p. 386. † Isaiah xi.

some darker page of Scripture,—to some such scene as that recorded in the fifteenth chapter of the book of Judges for instance, where we have an account of Samson's foxes howling through the corn-fields, the vineyards, and the olive banks, tied tail to tail, with firebrands between. Such is the complete inversion of all that ought to be, when the disciples of Christ, instead of "keeping themselves secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues,"* are—unlike their Master—everywhere striving, and crying, and making their voices to be heard in the streets.†

THE APOLOGY.

Such is the unhappy state of things under which the churches of Christ and our country are labouring, and in the painfulness and responsibility of which we are all more or less involved. And, in these circumstances, ought not every one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ—every friend of religion, of his country, of humanity, deeply to deplore such a state of things, and do what in him lies to bring about one that shall be more holy and healthful? This must be granted. But why, it may be asked, write another book upon the subject, why attempt anew what has been so often attempted already, and all in vain? Have not exclusive zealots (it may be said) been often, often, addressed already by every conceivable argument in favour of a catholic spirit and Christian unity? Have not writers of the most devoted piety given utterance in every touching form to the distress they have felt on beholding a spirit of such intolerance in their Christian brethren? Have they not endeavoured to shew that such a spirit is not the spirit of the Gospel, but, on the contrary, the old spirit of self-righteous pride, which

* Psalms xxxi. 20. † Matt. xii. 19.

used to shew itself under Judaism and heathenism, as well as under the Christian name—the old spirit, in short which has made pharisees in all ages and countries? Has it not been proved, that a conscientious adherence to one's own particular communion, does not require a commination of all who differ from us? Has it not been shewn that all evangelical Christians might fraternise, so as at once to honour the dictates of conscience and the demands of the spirit of love, which is the Spirit of Christ? Has not all this, it may be said, been attempted again and again, and has it not utterly failed to produce the effect intended? Nay, have not those who have made the attempt, only brought upon themselves a suspicion as to their love of the truth and of holiness, and earned for themselves the reproach of latitudinarianism. True. But previous failure is no sufficient argument against ultimate success. There is a time for all things. The nineteenth century may accomplish what the seventeenth attempted in vain. Time teaches better than words. Time teaches still by that method so much admired in the ancient geometers—the method of exhaustion. Time tries all ways of it, and holds up the results to the coming generations; and thus at last the true way is seen, and the many at last fall in with the few who were right in their day. But because the many do so at last, nothing that is right is ever to be despaired of. And if the treatises and testimonies in favour of a catholic spirit in religion, which a former age produced, were now culled from the ponderous volumes of that epoch, and presented to the Christian public in a separate work of a size suited to our times, effects might result of which no traces appeared when they were first published. A book, however full of truth, falls dead from the press when it does not speak to the times in which it appears. But "a word fitly spoken, is like apples of gold

in pictures of silver." * And let the course of Providence, or the more immediate influences of the Spirit, bring any state of feeling on any given subject to the hearts of the many, and then a book which addresses that feeling, and by cogent illustration and argument builds it up into a reasonable and defensible conviction, will not be published in vain. Now, it is the belief of the author, that the day is near at hand when thousands who are possibly quite close this moment, will be convinced that their hearts must be opened to a catholic spirit, before they can enjoy the peace of God in its fulness, or see the pleasure of the Lord prospering in their hands. And this has induced him to compose the following pages. They are not indeed of the nature of a compilation, such as he has alluded to. They are the thoughts of an individual mind. Nevertheless, they consist of views and arguments which have affected the author, and which, trusting in the blessing of God, he hopes will affect the minds of some of his readers likewise. But the event will prove. Meantime the author feels it to be a great encouragement, that since he began to arrange his ideas on this subject, several treatises have appeared in the English language, all having more or less the same object in view with that in the reader's hand. If it be asked why, when the field has thus been so well filled up already, he continued his labours, and now adds another volume to the previously great number referred to, he answers, that the line of argument he has adopted, and even the leading ideas of this work, are still to be found in the following pages alone. And if they were ever good for any thing, they are not diminished in value by the recent publication of the respectable treatises he has referred to. On the contrary, the way is rather paved by them, for the argument which follows. In proceeding with

* Prov. xxv. 11.

his publication, the author has also this encouragement, that if the truth of his views be but granted, they admit of being immediately realized, demanding no great and impracticable revolutions, no punctilious and effectless conferences, nothing more in short, but the opening of the hearts of the redeemed to one another. Let but this be done, and all besides that is desirable will follow in its own time. Along with party feelings denominational distinctions will die away. One member of the body of Christ will not say of another, "I have no need of you." And believers all through the Churches, loving each other, and seeking mutual communion, will unite without an effort, so as to form, along with those who are set over them in the Lord, one great visible church. All particular visible churches will unite into one visible church, as the invisible and catholic church is united into one already. The visible will come to resemble the invisible. The earthly will come to possess the image of the heavenly. The bride will be adorned for the bridegroom.

THE MANNER.

It may perhaps be thought by some readers, from the manner of the following work, that the author is of no particular communion, no particular opinions himself, and that thus it was easy for him to write in favour of a catholic spirit. But this is a mistake. Besides his faith in the indisputable essentials of Christianity, which are everywhere inwoven in the following pages, he has his own opinions and convictions on those disputable points about which chiefly dissensions arise. But in composing such a work as this, in which his endeavour has been "to sow in peace," and "to follow the things which make for peace," he has deemed it right to have his convictions on

these disputable points "to himself before God."* And as an illustration of the manner in which he has endeavoured to write, he begs the reader's attention to the following paragraph, especially since it contains also the statement of a mighty principle of Catholicism. It is from the work of one of the lights of a former age, still high in the esteem of the Church of England. "There is no part of this work (says Bishop Burnet) in which I have laboured with more care, and have writ in a more uncommon method, than concerning predestination; for, as my small reading had carried me farther in that controversy than in any other whatsoever, both with relation to ancients and moderns, and to the most esteemed books in all the different parties, so I weighed the article with that impartial care that I thought became me, and have taken a method which is, for ought I know, new, of stating the arguments on all sides with so much fairness, that those who know my own opinion on this point have owned to me, that they could not discover it by anything that I had written. They were inclined to think that I was of another opinion than they took me to be when they read my arguments on that side. I have not, in the explanation of that article, told what my own opinion was. Yet here I think it may be fitting to own, that I follow the doctrine of the Greek Church, from which St Austin departed, and formed a new system. After this declaration I may now appeal, both to St Austin's disciples and to the Calvinists, whether I have not stated their opinions and arguments, not only with truth and candour, but with all possible advantages. One reason among others which led me to follow the method I have pursued in this controversy, is to offer at the best means I can for bringing men to a better understanding of one

* Rom. xiv. 22.—Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God.

another, and to a mutual forbearance in these matters. This is at present the chief point of difference between the Lutherans and the Calvinists. Expedients for bringing men to an union on these heads, are projects that can never have any good effect. Men whose opinions are so different can never be brought to an agreement; and the settling of some equivocal formularies will never lay the contention that has arisen concerning them. *The only possible way of a sound and lasting reconciliation is to possess both parties with a sense of the force of the arguments that lie on the other side, that they may see they are no way contemptible, but are such as may prevail on wise and good men.* Here is a foundation laid for charity. And if to this men would add a just sense of the difficulties in their own side, and consider that the ill consequences drawn from opinions are not to be charged on all that hold them, unless they do likewise own these consequences, then it would be more easy to agree on some general propositions, by which those ill consequences might be condemned, and the doctrine in general settled, leaving it free to the men of the different systems to adhere to their own opinions, but withal obliging them to judge charitably and favourably of others, and to maintain communion with them notwithstanding that diversity."*

THE IDEA.

Such is the spirit in which the author has endeavoured to compose the treatise now in the reader's hand; and the following may be taken as a notion of the principal ideas which he has endeavoured to develope in it.

The Word of God, and the economy of creation, equally and emphatically commend the mutual love of all the

* Burnet on the XXXIX. Articles, Preface.

children of God, and the true unity of the church. And here let us remark, once for all, that by the term Church we mean the same as is meant by the Greek term ἐκκλησια, of which there are principally two significations in the word of God. First and *generally*, the whole body of the redeemed, that glorious company "which Christ loves as his spouse, and for which he gave himself,"*—"which he has built upon a rock, and against which the gates of hell shall never prevail,"†—"which is the general assembly of the first-born which are written in heaven,"‡—"the whole family in heaven and earth,"§—"the edifice built upon the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.‖" And, in the second place, and *in a more limited sense*, "a particular congregation of faithful men," in which application it is used by the apostles when they speak of "the churches of Christ,"¶—"the churches of the Gentiles,"**—"the church of God which is at Corinth,"††—"the church of the Thessalonians,"‡‡—"the church that was in the house of Priscilla and Aquila."§§

Now, according to either sense of the term, every one assents to the propriety, the moral beauty, the Christianity of catholicity of spirit, and the desirableness of Christian unity over all. But yet it so falls out, that no good comes of this general assent, this generally expressed desire; for almost every one adds, that whilst the present variety of denominations continues to exist among Christians, harmony cannot reign, and that, until some great revolution take place, we need not look for a true catholicity among Christians, nor a true unity in that society which is composed of them.

* Eph. v. 25. † Matt. xvi. 18. ‡ Heb. xii. 23.
§ Eph. iii. 15. ‖ Eph. ii. 20. ¶ Rom. xvi. 16.
** Rom. xvi. 4. †† 1 Cor. i. 2. ‡‡ 1 Thess. i. 1.
§§ Rom. xvi. 5.

Such is the prevalent feeling on this subject, and possibly every reader may be more or less under the influence of it. But how far ought we to suffer ourselves to remain under that influence? Ought we really to be guided by it, so as to refrain from all efforts in favour of a catholic spirit and Christian unity, and either continue wholly inactive in this respect, or wrap ourselves up in exclusive regard for our own communion, or join in the general discord? While our blessed Saviour prayed and prayed again, the last night he ministered on this earth, that all his people might be one—while he says, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one towards another"—while the Word of God assures us "that all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," are we to make no effort towards unity? are we to entertain no mutual love, but such as mere circumstances and accidental affections may naturally give birth to? Since it is a fact, that persons in general continue to be of the same sect or denomination with their parents, and that they generally believe in its excellence exclusively, just as their parents did, are we to suppose that the truth as to this matter comes only by inheritance, especially when it is to our individual regeneration that we look for religious light in all other things? Are we to continue thus hereditarily to bite and devour one another, taking no heed that we are consumed of one another? Why despair of a true and wide-spreading harmony among all Christians, a true and spiritual, though not perhaps a nominal and systematic, unity over all the churches, if not in our day, yet so soon at least, that it is already time to begin to attune the strings which are to give it utterance? Doubtless we ought to do something.

What, then, is it that we ought to do? What is our duty as Christians in the present circumstances in which

it has pleased God to call us into being, and to place us for probation? That there is a great variety among Christians cannot be disputed; and truly it is deeply to be deplored, that the redeemed should be distinguished by any other name than that of their Redeemer. It is a fact, however, that they are so distinguished. Denominational distinctions exist. They must, therefore, be considered; and since they cannot be immediately done away, this state of things must be recognised as a present fact, and taken into account when we are endeavouring to discover our present duty. But is there not also a true and a spiritual unity among all who truly believe the gospel, and who are consequently all truly united to Christ the head of all? And ought we to conclude at once, that the variety which is, must necessarily prevent the harmony which ought to be? In that science, from which the term harmony itself is borrowed, on the contrary, it is well known, that, in order to true harmony, there even must be variety as well as unity—variety to prevent monotony, as well as unity to prevent discord. May we not suppose then, at least until we have enquired somewhat into the matter, that the variety which now exists in the church, instead of unavoidably preventing, might even be made to contribute to a grand and wide-spreading concert among all denominations—a blissful harmony,—leading, in the shortest time, and by the right way, to all the order and outward unity and symmetry of constitution, which it may be the design of God ultimately to establish among believers.

The Church of Rome has another idea. Uniformity over all is its watchword and its boast; and in the attempt to force uniformity over all, it counts no costs too dear, no sacrifices too great. Nor has this idea been confined to the Church of Rome. The churches of the Reformation have here, as in many other things, only re-

peated what was prevalent in the church out of which they sprung; and each, with fewer pretensions than the parent (for none but the Church of Rome pretends to infallibility), has too often maintained its own model as that with which all others must be uniform before they be right, or even entitled to the name of CHURCH. But from this view nothing better has resulted from first to last but persecution where it was possible, and schism where it was not; for no one church has as yet so commended itself all along, either on its own authority or excellence, or on Scripture grounds, as to prevent a conscientious conviction from arising, and that in men who feel as if God-sustained, and who can carry out their convictions into action, that reformation was needed. But nothing is less likely to be granted than reformation when the demand for it arises only from the few; for the very demand implies an accusation of the many, and is taken amiss at the very outset; and thus reformation being refused, and conviction of its necessity still urging on the few, a variation shoots out; a new church is formed. And when such men as St Hilary and Luther take the lead in these movements, whether it be against Arianism in a pope, as with the Bishop of Poitiers in the fourth century, or with corruption over all, as with the German reformer in the sixteenth, and while Christ declares that whoso is of the truth heareth his voice, who will say that such witnesses should not lift up their voice whatever the consequences? But, without canvassing this question, it is a fact that variations exist. It is also a fact, not disputed, that the love of Christ reigns in the hearts of the pious in one evangelical communion as well as in another. It is also a fact, that all the evangelical communions alluded to are wholly at one in their faith, when the Bible is taken as the record and confession of that faith. Differences begin to shew themselves only when opinions

begin to shew themselves; nor do these differences extend to things essential to salvation or godliness. But, granting all the extent to which it may be maintained that variations exist, is there not still a unity in all in spirit? And, were the evangelical churches only fitly framed together in mutual esteem and affection, would not the inner and spiritual unity which they would display in their variety of outward forms be a constitution of the universal church, whence a glorious harmony might ascend, well-pleasing to God, and which, by the most rapid movements possible, might be expected to merge, when the appointed time comes, into perfect unison over all?

But may we entertain such a view in harmony with God's Word? What says that Word on the subject? What does it lead us to expect as to the form and constitution of *the expanding church?* This is the grand inquiry; for the authority of the Word of God is always paramount. Now, without entering here on what will fall to be inquired into hereafter, we may merely remark, that the expected form of the church, in so far as that is revealed in Scripture, may be learned most briefly by observing the form of the objects to which Scripture likens it; for it is admitted on all hands, that there are no direct and explicit declarations on this subject, other than such as are very general and spiritual. Now, in the Word of God the church is figured by the cherubim, which, while it was "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty," was composed of three varied forms, the heads of three living creatures, various, yet not separated, but, on the contrary, all united into one of another form. It is elsewhere likened to a body with one head, yet consisting of many varied members,*—to a temple with one chief corner-stone, but built of a great variety of stones,†—to a city which is one, and surrounded by one wall, but which contains

* 1 Cor. xii. 27. † Eph. ii. 21.

many bulwarks, palaces, and towers,*—to a great sheet let down from heaven, in which were all kinds and forms of living creatures, from creeping to flying, not separated by many partitions, however, but knit only at the four corners,†—in a word, to Noah's ark, which, notwithstanding that admirable unity which kept it together while it went to and fro on the waters, was yet, in point of variety, an epitome of the whole creation. And of the same general character are the other objects by which the church is figured and represented in revelation. In short, with respect to the form of the church, every object adduced in the Word of God to illustrate it, pictures to us not an absolute uniformity over all, as fancy is ever apt to desire, as deeming it most beautiful and holy, and to view as alone compatible with true unity, but rather *an unity of spirit in variety of form.*

Nor are Scripture illustrations all that tend to this conclusion. The spiritual agency by which the life of the church is sustained and its form developed, is also everywhere described in the divine records as a power whose characteristic, in like manner, is not uniformity, but unity in variety. The unity of the Spirit, in the variety of his gifts and operations, is indeed one of the leading features of the gospel dispensation. "There are diversities of gifts (says the Apostle), but the same Spirit; and there are differences of administrations, but the same God, who worketh all things in all. As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? if the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? And now are there many members, but yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you."‡

* Ps. xlviii. † Acts xi. 6. ‡ 1 Cor. xii. 12—21.

Thus it appears, from all these analogies, that not a universal uniformity over all, but rather an unity in variety, an unity of spirit and co-operation in variety of form and manner, is all that scripture, treating of the church at large, leads us to expect during the growth of the kingdom of grace. It is also that which the analogy of the kingdom of nature points to; for it is that which that kingdom everywhere displays while in movement. It is therefore that which God indicates as creator, not less than as author of revelation; and we ought not to forget, that all creation is expressive of the ways of God, and full of doctrine. Of the heavenly bodies, the voice at the creation said, Let them be for *signs* as well as for seasons; and it is equally true of the works of God in general, that they too are significant and symbolic of the ways and will of God, as well as merely useful to man. Now all creation, so long as it is in movement, and undergoing development, constantly developes and displays variety, as well as unity. The course of providence also manifests the same principle on every hand. The view here suggested is therefore as well supported by direct reasoning, as by the immediate testimony of Scripture.

No doubt, the formula of unity of spirit in variety of form, when exemplified in its utmost beauty, leads to the idea of an economy, in which there shall not only be one central object (as there ever must be in every form of the church of Christ), but an orderly arrangement of spiritual ranks, regularly descending and expanding from the centre to the circumference, from the apex to the base, from the one to the many, from the head to the members, and thus uniting them in an orderly and radiant whole. But such a state of things is plainly compatible only with a certain other state of things. It is plainly not to be arrived at, nor expected during periods such as the present, when Christian civilization, and popular en-

lightenment in true religion and morality, are as yet only in their infancy, and in very various stages of advancement in different regions of the earth, and when humanity all over the world is changing so very rapidly. In order to the establishment of such a radiant economy over all, Christian society must be in a state of great repose and full development, such as there is no example of in the present age, in any region of the world. During the present epoch, unity of spirit in variety of form, without any such symmetry, appears to be the only attainable form of the great principle referred to May not this, then, be that which, in the nature of things, and according to the will of God, corresponds to the present epoch, and is proper to it? and may we not reasonably hope, that, if all Christians would but unite harmoniously in the present day according to this model, then, although, in reference to certain churches, there should be no legally drawn bonds of union intermediate between Christ and the ministers of individual congregations, but only the unseen bonds of affection, still, this unction of mutual esteem and fraternal love flowing over all and through all, would, when the blessed day came, soon bring it to pass, that the already spiritually united church would, without an effort, and just by the breath of the Spirit and the light of God's countenance upon it, spontaneously, as it were, transform itself into one great radiant society, of outward symmetry and beauty and order also.

If we do insist on an absolute uniformity over all as of the essence of Christian unity, we place ourselves in a strange dilemma. For it has been very ably shewn by the Bishop of Meaux in the interest of the Church of Rome, that the great heads of the Reformation, and those who acted a leading part in settling the form of the first Reformed Churches, differed from each other in many points; and thence, taking for granted, or at least wish-

ing the reader to take for granted, and himself merely stating, in a few sentences in his preface, that uniformity is a first principle or criterion of truth; and, leading the reader to believe that the church in whose interest he writes has been uniform, both in faith and practice, all along, he concludes that all the departures of the Reformers from the tenets of the Church of Rome are mere heresies, and the whole work of the Reformation a piece of confusion. Such is the scheme of Bossuet's work, and it is one of the weightiest against the evangelical churches which has ever been written. It has also been lately published in English, and at a very cheap price, so that it is easily accessible to every body.

Ever since ecclesiastical histories were written, however, and more especially since Mr Edgar wrote his book in the interest of Protestantism, directly to contrast with that of Bossuet, it has been seen that the premises of the Romish prelate involve the condemnation of the Church of Rome, not less than the churches of the Reformation; since, far from a universal uniformity, as Bossuet wishes to be believed, there have been as many variations among Romanists as among the Reformed. It has been proved on both sides, that variations have existed all along; and if we but assume the principle of uniformity as the test of the true church, and the only condition of Christian unity, then, not the churches of the Reformation only, but the church which preceded them also, have had no unity, no truth in them. All, in a word, has been but confusion.

Now, though the consequences of admitting such a principle are so grave, it is certain that there is a very general prepossession in favour of this same principle of uniformity; and no doubt that prepossession will remain and operate hereafter, as well as now, and thus effect uniformity, so soon as the present obstructions to it are removed,—

as soon, perhaps, as it ought to be. But, is this uniformity a thing of such paramount importance that we must insist upon it now, in the face of the impossible? Granting much to it, must we give up all for its sake? So far as I am aware, this has never yet been duly inquired into. The real merits of the principle have not been duly canvassed, neither in the light of Scripture nor of philosophy. To these points, therefore, a considerable portion of the following pages are devoted.

In the discussion of this theme, the author has taken occasion to dwell more on the necessity of forbearance and love, than many persons will have a toleration for; and it will no doubt be alleged against him by not a few, that he is no lover of the Truth, because he does not contend with fierceness for one side exclusively, of every disputed point. He is ready to suffer, however, rather than become uncandid. He feels deeply that it is Self, and Self only, that is the fountain of those irascible passions, which, consecrated, as it were, by religion being made their occasion, are so much in vogue at present. He can find no place for them in Christianity, and he has not indulged in them. It is, moreover, certain, that the method of denunciatory writing and polemical theology has been fairly tried, and that it has completely failed. Age after age it has been continued, and new variations and new schisms have still increased, and indeed been its only fruit. Is not this an intimation, then, by the God of providence and grace, that something else besides polemics is needed, something else than metaphysical discussion required, to bring together into one the children of God, who are now scattered abroad? Is it not clearly indicated, in short, not less now by the awards of the Head of the Church, than by the whole tenor of the Gospel, that Christians ought not to strive against one another, but, on the contrary, to stand fast in one spirit, with

one mind, striving together for the faith of the Gospel, witnessing to the world that they are Christians, because of the love which they have to one another?

Not for one moment, indeed, let it be forgotten, that the truth as it is in Jesus is the only foundation on which any man can build with safety to himself and to the church, and that it is both a duty and a privilege to defend it, and to contend for it; and both an act of Christian benevolence, and one that has a rich reward, to seek the conversion of the soul that is erring from it. But why confound between the clearly revealed truth of God and our own disputable opinions on disputable points? Why "destroy with thy meat him for whom Christ died?" Oh, let us never forget that "the kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." "He that in these things serveth Christ, is (we are assured) acceptable to God, and approved of men." "Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another." * Let but a true Christian affection prevail between all who love the Lord Jesus, harmoniously with the spirit of the apostle, who prays that on all such, grace, mercy, and peace may come;—let but the amenities of Christian feeling take the place of angry polemics on points, which it has now been fully proved must ever continue, till humanity itself receive new light, to be disputable, except in the words in which the Holy Ghost has invested them, and in which all receive them with one accord,—and it would not be long till we all came, "in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Let us therefore heartily unite in praying for what is characterized in the Book of Common Prayer as the good estate of the

* Rom. xiv. 19.

catholic church, "that it may be so guided and governed by the good Spirit of God, that all who profess and call themselves Christians, may be led into the way of truth, and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and righteousness of life."

Besides the duty of forbearance and love between Christians, the author has also frequently insisted on the necessity of a greater reverence for the Word of God than is commonly paid to it. This he regards as the grand means which, along with mutual forbearance and love, and a recognition of the principle of the catholic church existing both in variety and unity, will prevent new divisions, and duly effect the obliteration of such as are established, until, in the latter day, there shall be outward and visible unity over all, as well as more immediately a real and spiritual unity in and through all.

It has been already stated, that all Christians are already at one, when the Bible is taken as the confession of their faith. It is only when we call into play the uninspired mind and its interpretations, human thoughts and human opinions, things fallible and factitious, and when, by them, we replace the words in which the Holy Ghost teacheth the truth, that differences and schisms arise. Granting, then, with respect to the past, all that is contended in favour of human authority, let there only, for the future, be a greater veneration for the Word of God, less rashness of interpretation, less consulting of God's word with a view to support our individual opinions, and more consulting of it, simply to learn what the Spirit has communicated to us, and what the Lord would have us to do; and then we will rest satisfied with the Word as we actually find it, and sink our own disputable opinions in the same proportion. Our differences will die away, and Christian men, who esteem each other as such, will meet in the Word, where they know they are agreed, and

which they all venerate, and all will come to be one again, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day.

THE TITLE.

To express the nature of this work as perspicuously as possible, I have entitled it "The Catholic Spirit of True Religion," refraining, not without regret, from using the term catholicism or catholicity instead of "catholic spirit," lest its use might have induced some members of the Church of Rome to purchase the work under a false impression, and so to pay for a disappointment which they might have laid to the author's charge. Not but that I should be very happy to think of these pages being perused by any members of that communion: But this is what dare scarcely be hoped for; since, of all from whom I anticipate objections to the views here advanced, there is none from whom I expect so many as the Romanist. Yet this has not prevented me from observing an act of deference to him, even on the title-page of this work. And from respect to him, I have avoided the use of the term catholicism, since the ascendency of the Church of Rome in that country of which that word is a native, has brought its import from the original and true idea of universality, to signify, most generally now, the system or theory of the Church of Rome, of which, if this work treats, it cannot be said that it approves.

The English use of the term was indeed once different, and ought to be so still. Its rightful use is given in the following quotation from an English divine of a former age:—"Wherefore, I conclude" (says Dr Pearson) "that this catholicism, or second affection of the church, consisteth generally in universality, as embracing all sorts of persons, as to be disseminated through all nations, as

comprehending all ages, as containing all necessary and saving truths, as obliging all conditions of men to all kinds of obedience, as curing all diseases, and planting all graces in the souls of men."* Such is the legitimate use of the term catholicism, and in this sense I should like to have used it. To prevent the possible mistake which has been alluded to, however, this has been avoided. The sacrifice made, however, is a matter of no consequence.

But let it be well remarked, that with regard to the term catholic, the members of the Church of Rome have no right, nor can be in any way justified in arrogating it exclusively to their own communion. Nor are the Reformed Churches wise in giving up the use of that term, which, even according to the definition which the Church of Rome gives of it, embraces ourselves and all true believers, that ever have been, are now, or shall be hereafter. The term catholic, though not found in the Scriptures themselves, was early introduced into the church, as is proved by its having a place in the creed. It has also a charm from its true meaning as well as its antiquity, and is a well sounding word withal. It should not be given up.

Nor do we commit any trespass against the members of the Church of Rome in using the term catholic, as embracing ourselves. On the contrary, it is they who depart from their own standard, in appropriating it exclusively to their own communion. For, not to adduce quotations from St Augustine, and others of the Fathers, who have clearly shewn in their writings, that when they speak of the Catholic Church, or the church in its most general sense, they mean the whole church, invisible, as well as visible, it is enough to remark here, that the Council of Trent itself has defined "the Catholic Church" so minutely, as to leave no doubt that

* Pearson on the Creed, Art. ix.

the meaning which that Council attached to it, is likewise that which has just been affirmed to be that of St Augustine, and consequently, that "all-embracing" (the saints in heaven included, as well as those who now are, or shall be hereafter on the earth), is the meaning of the term "catholic," in the Church of Rome, to this day. Thus, in illustrating the ninth article of the Creed, that Council, after stating that "the prophets lead us to expect that impious men should not be wanting, who, after the manner of the ape which simulates the man, should maintain that they alone were catholics, and no less wickedly than proudly affirm that the Catholic Church was with them only" (To whom do these words apply most justly in our day?), proceeds to define the term catholic, in an excellent paragraph, of which the following is a literal translation. "The third property of the church (says the Catechism) is, that it is called *catholic*, that is, *universal*, which name is with truth applied to it, since, as says St Augustine, from the rising to the setting sun, the light of the true faith is spread abroad. Neither is it, as in human commonwealths or heretical conventicles, circumscribed by the boundaries of one kingdom, or of one race of men, but all men, whether barbarians or Scythians, bond or free, male or female, are embraced in its bosom of charity. Wherefore it is written, "Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, and has made us a kingdom for our God."* David says concerning the church, "Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for thy possession."† Likewise, "I will make mention

* Rev. v. 10. This is after the Vulgate, the word "priests" being omitted in the Catechism of the Council of Trent, the Greek being as in our public version.

† Psalm ii. 8.

of Rahab and Babylon among those who know me," and "the man was born in her."* Besides, *all the faithful who have been from Adam to this day, and all who shall be as long as the world lasts, professing the true faith, belong to the same church*, who are all based and built on that same only stone Christ, who has made both one, and has proclaimed peace to those who are near and to those who are afar off.† For this reason also it is called universal, because all who desire to obtain eternal salvation, ought to hold and embrace it, not otherwise than those who entered the ark, that they might not perish in the deluge. This, therefore, is to be delivered as a most certain rule, whereby the true and the false church may be judged."

Such is a translation of the entire paragraph in the catechism of the Council of Trent, on the subject of the catholicism of the church. And from this it plainly appears, that, according to the standard of the Church of Rome, the catholic church means the universal church, the invisible church, the whole body of the redeemed, one part militant, one part triumphant, one part future.

Romanists themselves being judges, therefore, the Church of Rome, in the present day, can be no more than a part of the catholic church. And is it not difficult to find good grounds on which to grant even that to her, with any more, or even so much propriety as almost any other church? For, in the first place, she possesses no longer now that entire possession of the field of the world, on account of which the catechism, by a quotation from St Augustine, says, that the term catholic is justly applied. The light of *the one faith* is, indeed, far more widely spread now than it was in St Augustine's day; but that is not "*the manifold faith*," either as laid down in the standard of the Church of Rome, or as kept up by her priesthood. On the contrary, the family Bible now, in

* Psalm lxxxvii. 4, 5. † Eph. ii. 14, 17.

many a region of the world, intimates to the Romish priest, that his reign is over, and that he must either retire before the supremacy of the word of God, or else consent to it as the charter between him and a Christian people, and consequently, cease to be a Romish priest. The Church of Rome is now only one communion of many. She is no longer universal, and in this view, therefore, she has no longer any claims to the exclusive use of the term catholic.

But farther, she is, of all churches, the most exclusive. Some of the more enlightened in her communion, have indeed attempted of late to deny this, and to represent her as very charitable, such, in short, as the catechism just quoted from, describes the catholic church to be. But when examined into, any authoritative statements which have been made on this subject, leave matters just where they were long ago, in this respect; except, indeed, that the attempt to make a shew of liberality demonstrates, that individual Romanists, and particular branches of the Church of Rome, now wish to be thought more charitable, and no doubt feel more liberally, than they dare declare with respect to their church as a whole. Thus, in a document lately published by the Bishops of the Church of Rome in Great Britain, of which the original is stated by them to be deposited in the British Museum, and which has been printed in the form of a tract, entitled An Exposition of Faith, &c.* the authors, when answering the charge of their exclusiveness as to Salvation, affirm that their church is exclusive only on the same principle on which Christianity itself is exclusive, quoting as proofs and illustrations of their meaning, Mark xvi. 16; John iii. 5; and Galat. v. 21. Now, to

* An Exposition of Faith, or Declaration of the Catholic Bishops, the Vicars Apostolic and their coadjutors in Great Britain; a Tract of eight pages 8vo.

all this every Christian must assent; and so far all is well. But immediately after, the Bishops go on to say, with a semblance of charity only, as will immediately appear, that *the catholic* is not permitted to pronounce sentence of condemnation on individuals, who may live and die out by the external communion of the catholic church. We say with a semblance of charity only, for in these words there is an omission, which, if not designed, is at least directly calculated to deceive the reader, and to pass him off with an equivoque on the subject of charity, instead of a sincere profession of it. The Bishops say only that *the catholic* is not permitted to pronounce sentence of condemnation, &c. Very true. But what does this amount to? It leaves the practice of *the church* just where it was. The catholic is not much encouraged to pronounce sentence on any subject. The church does it all. And since the authors of this "Exposition" say nothing as to the church on the subject of their exclusion of protestants from all hope of salvation, we are left altogether uninformed by this tract, whether the Church of Rome be not as exclusive and intolerant still, as she used to be. But though we find nothing satisfactory on this subject in the tract, it is otherwise, in some works published lately abroad, and nearer the fountain-head of the Romish church. In the first volume of a course of theology, published a few years ago, at the press of the Propaganda at Rome, and by one of the professors in that establishment, it is maintained, that though possibly the virtuous heathen, who have never heard of the Gospel, may be saved, yet there is no hope for protestants; and that those are to be charged with a dereliction of principle, who maintain or admit the possibility of their salvation. We are obliged to conclude, therefore, that, down to this day, the Church of Rome is altogether exclusive of other churches, and that, not only as churches,

but as societies containing in them any members at all who are in a state of salvation, or who can be saved otherwise than by joining the Church of Rome, if they have an opportunity of doing so. Since exclusiveness, then, is something so opposite to universality or catholicity, what word can so ill characterize the Church of Rome as the term catholic? But waiving this consideration, and even building only upon the definition which the Church of Rome herself gives of the term catholic, it is evident that she has no exclusive right to the use of the term. For, according to her own standards, as has been shewn, *the Catholic Church is the name for the whole body of the redeemed, triumphant as well as militant.* Every Christian, therefore, belongs to the Catholic Church.

This definition of her own, then, sets us right with the Church of Rome as to the use of the term Catholic in the title of this work, since the following pages have chiefly for their object to shew the duty of a cordial acquiescence in this very principle, that every Christian is a member of the catholic church; and that all Christians ought to feel and act towards each other as Christian brethren; and all churches to entertain towards each other those feelings of mutual recognition and esteem which are becoming in the constituent parts of a great spiritual whole —a whole which, were this plan adopted, would in due time become visibly one church, and which even now, though visibly many, yet possesses a true and a spiritual unity under Christ its only head; as do the branches of the same vine in which the same sap is circulating; and "which (as Gregory I. beautifully says when describing the Catholic Church) has pushed forth as many buds as there have been saints since the righteous Abel, till the last of the elect who shall be born to the end of the world."*

* Greg. in Ev. Homil. xix.

Having thus vindicated the title of this work in reference to the use which the Church of Rome makes of the term catholic, a very few words will be enough to do the same with respect to the churches of the Reformation. In short, the term catholic is everywhere used by them to signify universal. Thus, in the Westminster Confession, which is to this day the standard of the Established Church of Scotland, and which of all that have ever been composed by any reformed church, is the most intensely opposed to the Church of Rome, we nevertheless find a perfect agreement with the Council of Trent as to the import of the term catholic. In the Westminster Confession, however, we have to admire the frankness and fulness with which the principle of catholicism is laid down; for there the ambiguous term church is omitted when the principle is stated. *Catholicism is declared to extend unto all who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.*

The xxvth chapter, which relates to the Church, consists of six paragraphs, four of which explain the catholicism of the church, and are as follows:—

I. The catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the head thereof, and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

II. The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation as under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, and of their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

III. Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the ga-

thering and perfecting of the saints in this life to the end of the world, and doth by his own presence and spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereto.

IV. This catholic church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible, and particular churches which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

Add to these the two following paragraphs in the next chapter, on the Communion of the Saints.

I. All saints that are united to Jesus Christ, their head, by his spirit and by faith have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory, and being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good both in the inward and outward man.

II. Saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification, as also in relieving each other in outward things according to their several abilities and necessities. *Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.*

Having thus found that the Church of Rome and the Church of Scotland, which are extremes, do yet agree in attaching the same meaning to the term catholic, and that meaning the same which that term signifies in the title of this work; having thus vindicated that title in reference to both, it will not be expected that the Church of England, which lies between, will present any other view, or require many words. Accordingly, we find all

that is given in the Articles of that church, as a definition of the church in these words, "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."* And Bishop Burnet, who, perhaps, more than any other, may be regarded as the Church's expounder of her articles, thus sums up his observations upon this one, "If we believe that any society retains the fundamentals of Christianity, we do from that conclude it to be a true church, to have a true baptism, and the members of it to be capable of salvation." The term catholic does not indeed occur here, nor do his texts require the author to make frequent use of it, since it does not even once occur in all the thirty-nine Articles. And, indeed, it must be confessed that the Church of England, generally, is shy in the use of it, which is the more to be wondered at since it is an emphatic word in both the creeds which form part of her ritual, and the more to be regretted since her influence is justly the greatest of all in fixing the use of words in the English language. Still, however, Bishop Burnet does occasionally use it, and when he does, he means by the catholic church, as we should expect, the aggregate of all those which he has defined above as true churches. Besides the use of the term catholic, we also find the principles of catholicism duly stated by him. Thus under the thirty-fourth article, where he shews that in matters of rule and ritual, there was great variety in the unity of the church until Charlemagne began to force a uniformity over all, he says in one place, "It is therefore suitable to the nature of things, to the authority of the magistrate, and to the obligations of the pastoral care, that every church should act within herself as

* Art. xix.

an entire and independent body;" and in another, "It is certain that all the parts of the Catholic Church ought to hold a communion one with another, and mutual commerce and correspondence together." Add to this the observations on catholicism already quoted, from Pearson on the Creed, another of the many lights of the Church of England, and let these remarks suffice on the subject as to the National Churches.

And now, I presume, we may pass on. For as to the more considerable of the dissenting churches, their actual voice (whatever the personal feelings of not a few dissenters) is in general as much in favour of catholicism, in the sense in which the term is used in this work, as the standards of the national establishments have been shewn to be. Thus, one of their greatest ornaments concludes one of his works in these terms, with which let us also conclude this paragraph. "Reasoning (says Robert Hall) supplies an effectual antidote to mere speculative error, but opposes a feeble barrier to inveterate prejudice, and to that contraction of feeling which is the fruitful parent of innumerable mistakes and misconceptions in religion. There is no room, however, for despondency, for as the dictates of Christian charity are always found to coincide with the purest principles of reason, the first effect of inquiry will be to enlighten the mind, the second to expand and enlarge the heart; and when the Spirit is poured down from on high, He will effectually teach us that God is love, and that we never please him more than when we embrace with open arms, without distinction of sect or party, all who bear his image."*

* See a Reply to the Rev. M. Kinghorn, by Robert Hall, Conclusion.

PART II.

PRINCIPLES AND CONSIDERATIONS.

I. PRINCIPLES.

SCRIPTURE.

TRADITION.

AN INFALLIBLE CHURCH.

REASON.

GRACE.

LIBERTY.

TOLERATION.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

UNITY AND UNIFORMITY.

THE SUBSTITUTION.

THE PREPOSSESSION.

THE QUESTION.

THE SUPREMACY OF REVELATION.

In every question touching religion, the authority of Revelation is supreme. How thankful ought we to be that we have such a light to guide us! How little disposed to raise up our own opinions in opposition to it!

In the question, therefore, whether each individual denomination should consider itself as the alone type of what ought to be immediately over all, and refuse to recognise and feel kindly towards others which vary from it, or whether all "congregations of faithful men" should agree in considering each other as the varied members of the same body, some more, some less comely indeed, yet all members of Christ, all branches of the catholic church, and all to be tempered together, and each to have a care of the others, and all to rejoice when one is honoured, so that there be no schism in the body —in other words, in the question whether an universal uniformity in religion be alone right and commendable, or whether, in the present age of the world at least, an unity of spirit in variety of form be not a constitution of the universal church permitted by the genius of the Gospel, anticipated by prophecy, and sanctioned as the right road to a perfect unity in the latter day, we ought to come at once to revelation as the arbiter and the test of truth. If it be expressly revealed, or if there be a general consent among intelligent believers, that there is no toleration under the Gospel economy for variations, even in matters of comparative indifference, such as those which at present unhappily divide the various evangelical denominations, however perfect

the unity of spirit which animates and unites them all, if it plainly appear from revelation, that there is no permission in the Word of God, for a variety of forms in the externals of religion, and for differences of views in minor points; but, on the contrary, that an universal uniformity and identity in views is the unconditional ordinance of God, and that alone which is compatible with the church of Christ in all ages and in every state of society, then there is neither place nor need for inquiring about the matter;—the following pages are wholly superfluous. However alarming the consequences of such a state of things, however dreadful the duties which the Christian may feel that it imposes on him,—though it call on every denomination now extant to unchurch every other denomination, and thus to divide all christendom against itself,—though it make it to be judged a duty by the strongest (especially if it deems itself infallible) to try to impress conformity upon all the others, by every means and at all costs (For what is the torture or even the martyrdom of a few thousand who are lost at any rate, if, by their punishment, even one can be saved to the church, and much more if rising variations can be prevented?)—the point is settled. From the decision of God's word there can be no appeal. It is right, therefore, that we begin by inquiring into the testimony and evidence of Revelation on the subject to which this work relates.

TRADITION.

But what are we to regard as revelation? Shall we include under this name, not the written word only, but oral tradition also, and hold both as forming together the sum of revelation, and as matches for each other in

divine authority? The Church of Rome does this, and pronounces anathema on all who dare to exalt the written word above tradition. But shall we do so? Let us bestow a few words on the question, even though it detain us for a few moments on the threshold of our argument. For, of those who are opposed to the views of this work, and who maintain the necessity of an universal uniformity in religion, who require that every act of worship, and every point in all that relates to the church, shall be regulated and conducted according to certain formulæ in their own possession,—formulæ which fix every thing, and leave no place for the exercise of reason and conscience at all, and consequently none for variety between one church and another,—tradition is the stronghold. It is too much respected by a certain party in the Church of England. And the Church of Rome, as her warrant for the restraints which she imposes on the pious aspirations and the devout effusions of the individual soul, constantly appeals to the authority of traditions said to regulate all these things. Nor this without being responded to. There is a charm in the voice of antiquity. Wherever there is a doubt, there is hope in the idea of an ancient tradition. To this none is altogether insensible, whatever the subject. But in the case of religion, it is felt more strongly than in any other. The unregenerated religious temperament always seeking evidence for its own prepossessions, courts the obscure, where there is, at all events, but little to contradict them, and possibly some hints, which may be built up into arguments in their favour. It, therefore, delights in antiquity, were it only on account of its obscurity. But more than this, in going to consult antiquity, one feels as if he were going to the fountain-head, as if he were leaving the region of echoes for that of the original voices. And so he is. Let us not reject antiquity, therefore. Let us not take for granted that it is

of no value, before we have learned what it is. Nor let the fact, that the inspired volume is sufficient for salvation and for guidance, supersede the inquiry into the testimony and the teaching of antiquity. The inspired volume is indeed sufficient of itself; but a knowledge of Christian antiquity must be instructive. It is the womb from whence both our fathers and we have sprung; and, if we are rightly to know ourselves, we must know who have gone before us and made way for us, and what they have been, and done, and suffered.

Seeking into Christian antiquity for original voices in religion, however, it is obvious that, in order to find them, we must go back all the way to the inspired writers themselves. And with regard to the after ages, if the apostles, under the infallible guidance of the prophetic vision which they enjoyed, give any notices of what is coming, these notices, if we are to venerate antiquity, ought to guide us as to the reception we give to the utterances of the coming voices, at least in so far as they are originals, and do not carry in themselves the proof of their own goodness in the character of what they utter. Suppose the inspired writers teach us not to expect much from them, then viewed as mere authorities, their authority is damaged to that extent. Now this is exactly the case with respect to the ancient church. Our Saviour himself, and all the apostles, inform us, and that very emphatically, that perilous times were immediately coming, and that there was to be a great declension from the truth. Nor do they announce this in general terms only. They specify the very errors which were to prevail. They shew indeed that these errors were unworking themselves even in their own days. Now, looking into the history of the ancient church, we find not only errors, but these very errors prevailing. Are we then, in the face of the warning of our Saviour and all the inspired writers, to

build upon this lapsing church as a model? Are we not only to consult tradition, but to receive it as an authority merely because it is a tradition, and independently of its own worth and of the numberless errors, perhaps, by which we find it surrounded in the page whence we have extracted it? Surely not.

It may indeed seem strange that the Church of Rome, or any other church, should appeal to tradition as a trustworthy light, when we consider the well known fact that this authority, even in the age immediately succeeding the apostles, had been so little attended to, and was already so much obliterated, that it could not even decide when Easter ought to be kept. Though this be just one of those matters of ceremonial in regulating which the authority of tradition is principally claimed: yet on this point, and so early as the time of Polycarp, who was himself instructed by the apostles, conflicting traditions divided the Eastern and Western Churches, and began a controversy on the subject, which lasted for nearly two hundred years. Nay, if oral tradition had not begun to be contradictory and bewildering even in the days of the evangelists, what does St Luke mean in the preface to his gospel, where he assigns as his reason for writing it, —just that Theophilus might know the certainty of those things wherein he had been instructed! Is there not plainly implied in these words a difference as to certainty, and consequently as to trust-worthiness, between what is written down, and what floats from lip to lip, and that both as a general principle, and as to the state of the case in those days?

Is it not very strange, then, that tradition should be appealed to as a guide in our days, to depart from which is declared to be guilt as great as to depart from Holy Scripture! But let us not wonder. Tradition is necessary to the Church of Rome. However worthless it may

be, she cannot part with it. Wherever the sacerdotal order is to rule supreme, either it must make good that it has power to work miracles, or else traditions of divine authority must be claimed. Without either the one or the other, the pretension to a divine supremacy cannot be maintained. A theocracy cannot be simulated. Now, miracles cannot be had at pleasure. Every despotic priesthood, therefore, the Druidical, the Brahminical, as well as the Romish, have constantly had recourse to a divine tradition as the warrant for all their impositions.

Nay, under the Mosaic economy, the Scribes and Pharisees, as soon as the aggrandizement of their own order became a higher object with them than the ministry of true religion, had in like manner recourse to tradition. The law said, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it."* But in the face of this most positive commandment, the Pharisees, as we learn from our Redeemer's own lips, "made the Word of God of none effect by their traditions."† If, then, even in such circumstances, the Pharisees got up traditions, let us not wonder if the similarly self-aggrandizing priesthood of the mediæval church did the same. And if that priesthood did it in the middle ages, let us not wonder if the same priesthood does it still. For, not to speak of the difficulty of giving up a principle of long standing, especially in a church which claims to be infallible, the weakness of human nature teaches, that if you but grant a sufficiently urgent motive for any tenet,—the necessity, for instance, of tradition in order to uphold a system to which one is bred or wedded, and for which scripture, when alone, is felt to be an insufficient warrant,—then, however untenable the pretext of tradition may obviously be when viewed by itself, you need not wonder if the advocate of that system is

* Deut. iv. 2. xii. 32. † Matt. xv. 6.

forthwith the advocate of tradition too. The love of system is always strong. Men, otherwise of strong minds, have often brought themselves to believe the silliest things rather than give up their systems. But system, when it is the basis of our profession, and when along with it status in society and temporal interests must sink or swim, will reconcile a man to hold and even maintain any thing. However deeply it is to be deplored, therefore, still it is not a matter of wonder that even enlightened men, if only they be Romish priests, should maintain the equal authority of tradition and of the written word.

It must be admitted, however, that it is very difficult to conceive how a well educated layman, who is not under any of those necessities to which a Romish priest must reconcile himself in order to be a priest, and who is competent, in any moderate degree, to balance evidence, can regard, as equally trustworthy with the written word, the traditions brought forward by the clergy. For the written word lies before us in the very syllables penned by the inspired writers themselves; while the traditions, even supposing them to have been unquestionable at first, have to be gathered from the pages of writers, often many ages after,—writers, for whom the essential qualification of inspired guidance is not claimed, and who, to tell the truth, have often little else but the venerable name of "fathers" to recommend them. No doubt it is maintained that to prevent the degradation of that which was apostolic and divine, the church which holds these traditions has also enjoyed all along an infallible guidance. But for a well educated man, it must surely be just as difficult to believe in the infallibility of the Church of Rome in this sense, as to believe in the authenticity of its traditions. For if history be good for any thing, it is good for shewing that both Roman Pontiffs and General Councils have contradicted themselves and each other

often; and that, therefore, however necessary *in theory*, the doctrine of infallibility may be to a church which makes such extravagant pretensions as that of Rome, yet, in point of fact, that church has enjoyed no immunity from error. Plainly, therefore, it were contrary to every principle of good sense to place any traditions in the present day by the side of the written word as of equal authority.

And while it is contrary to good sense thus to honour oral tradition, it is no less contrary to scripture, for we have, in the Word of God, three declarations,—and, as if to give all possible emphasis and appliance to them, they are equally distributed,—one at the beginning,* one in the middle,† and one at the end ‡ of the sacred volume, all peremptorily forbidding any additions to the commandments and revelations which it contains.

The Apostle Paul does indeed, in two of his epistles,§ write favourably concerning what are there called traditions. It is to be remarked, however, that the term tradition, both in scripture, and in the fathers of the church, and indeed in modern philosophy too, is used not in contradistinction to the written word, but to the discoveries of reason and observation. It is used as synonymous with testimony. The charge which the Apostle Paul gives the Thessalonians respecting traditions in the passages referred to, proves nothing in favour of the Romish tenet. It only proves, that all the instructions which the Thessalonians ought to hold were not contained in the first epistle which the apostle had addressed to them—a consideration this apart altogether from the question between the Reformed Churches and the Church of Rome. The other passage in like manner, in the second epistle to Timothy, proves nothing in favour of an oral tradition

* Deut. iv. 2. † Prov. xxx. 6. ‡ Rev. xxii. 18.
§ 2 Thess. ii. 15; 2 Tim. ii. 2.

superadded to the written word, and containing things not found in that word ; for there is no evidence that the things which St Paul had preached to Timothy before many witnesses, and which he charges him to commit to others, were different from what we find in some part or other of that manifold revelation of God which constitutes the inspired volume. And after all, even granting the existence of valuable traditions in those days, how can one believe in their uncorrupted transmission down to the present day through so many ages, during which all things else have been changed ? Oral tradition must be given up.

AN INFALLIBLE CHURCH.

Scripture must be taken as the only trustworthy revelation, and when it is admitted to be trustworthy it must also be admitted to be supreme. If, indeed, there were an infallible church, its authority would not only be on a level with that of Scripture, but necessarily superior, for to it would belong the interpretation of Scripture ; and, consequently, whenever there was judged to be a doubt or a difficulty, we should be called upon to believe not what Scripture might appear to say (possibly plainly enough to us), but what the church said. In all cases, in short, where the church gave any deliverance at all, we should be called upon to receive its interpretations, its views. The word of God, being of an old date, could not possibly share the supremacy with any subsequent or *viva voce* power which claimed infallibility. The Scripture, in such a case, were worth consulting only on points (if there were any such) on which the church gave no deliverance. And, even in that case it would be incumbent on a thoughtful man, in order

to avoid every hazard of misunderstanding what he read, to consult the church as to its meaning. In a word, if there be in the church an infallible interpretation of Scripture, that is the only medium through which Scripture can be legitimately and safely viewed. And if this infallible guide profess at the same time to lead the believer in the way of life, without his needing to refer to Scripture at all, he need not refer to it; and if his guide forbid him, he cannot refer to it without sin. Grant only an infallible church, and Scripture is necessarily thrown altogether into the back ground. In truth, it becomes in that case wholly a superfluity to the private believer; and in many cases also it cannot but be a restraint and a hinderance to certain clergy. No wonder then that certain clergy should desire to raise up the more pliable code of oral tradition to balance the otherwise refractory teaching of Scripture.

Now, though the existence of such an authority as must thus unavoidably sink the word of God to so low a place, might, from this circumstance alone, seem extremely improbable, yet certainty is so pleasing to the human mind, and doubt, especially in a matter of such importance as religious truth, is so painful, that almost every one longs, in some period or other of his religious history, for an infallible guide and interpreter; and the Latin Church, always wise in its generation, always ready to build something for its own aggrandizement on every desire of the human breast, met this longing. The Church of Rome, though not in an early age, advanced the claim to infallibility, and still maintains that she is infallible!

The more enlightened in that communion, no doubt, who are aware of the facts of the case, and who know full well that both the past history and the present state of the Romish Church are altogether incompatible with

such a pretension, mean by infallibility, when attributed to their church, nothing more than *that* in her decisions which ought to lead us to acquiesce in them as of supreme and ultimate authority, and as worthy of being received, for the truth if not the truth. But this is not the original doctrine of infallibility. Nor does the church herself give up her pretensions to this extent. On the contrary, she holds out that she is infallible in the just sense of the term; and those who defend her have adduced arguments to substantiate and justify her claims.

Of these, the principal argument still is, the desirableness of infallibility in order to give peace of mind to anxious inquirers, and to preserve unity and order in the church. And if it really could effect these purposes without producing greater evils, no doubt infallibility would be desirable; and if it were generally deemed desirable, no doubt it would be generally believed on more slender evidence than would be demanded, were it not an acceptable doctrine. This, through human weakness, however, and not because desirableness is actually any evidence of reality or existence. We ought to remember that we readily believe what we wish to believe, not to help our faith, but to be on our guard against believing what we wish to believe, until we find evidence for it. And, in the present case, it is obvious that, be infallibility ever so desirable, this is no evidence at all that the Church of Rome possesses the gift.

How, then, is the claim of Rome to infallibility defended? To this end it is said that the church has, ever since the beginning, exercised the authority of teaching, deciding, and anathematizing those who would not submit to her authority. It is said that she received this authority from Jesus Christ himself, and that it is not to be believed that he would have invested his church with authority to teach and decide controversies in the faith, without im-

parting to her an infallible guidance at the same time. But this argument treats only of what man thinks that God ought to have done. It says nothing as to what God has done, and therefore is of no value in an inquiry relating to a matter of fact. Nor is it of any soundness as an a-priori argument generally. If we find that God made man fallible even in paradise and before the fall, are we to expect that he should make him infallible afterwards, when, even though redeemed, there is still such darkness and weakness in him as we can scarce conceive infallibility to be compatible with? If we find that man's primary position and calling in this world is for probation, are we to expect that in the highest and most especial walk of all, probation shall be superseded by infallible guidance being given? Besides, this argument is of no service to the Church of Rome; for the church, viewed in that aspect in which alone she is regarded as infallible, did not give a single utterance till the fourth century (325). The deliverance of an ecumenic council is alone held to be infallible, and at that epoch for the first time was an ecumenic council held. Preceding councils were merely the consultations of particular churches, which the Church of Rome does not regard as infallible authorities. During the preceding centuries, therefore, inquirers had no other guides in religion but their individual teachers, building on the word of God, and the instructions they had received from those who taught them. It is said, indeed, that during the earlier ages general councils were not needed, because the voices of the apostles were still echoing in all the churches. Good. And so they are still in all the churches of the Reformation. The voices of the Evangelists and apostles do indeed supply an infallible guidance,—all the infallible guidance that is given,—all that is needful. And we place them in the hands of every believer, saying to him as Moses did to

the church of old, "The commandment, which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it." *

But it is said the Scripture is obscure—you cannot attain to certainty in this way. Tell us then, what advantage over one of the evangelical has a member of the Church of Rome, in virtue of that infallibility which his church lays claim to, and pretends to supply to the faithful? Except in so far as the obscure decretals of the Council of Trent are sufficient to guide him, which, by the way (and much to the prejudice of the infallibility of Rome), he owes to the Reformation, and in which respect he is no wise superior to the Protestant, who commonly has his confession of faith too, the Romanist has no higher authority in any point than just the individual opinion of his own priest, or of some one else whom the church does in no degree warrant to be infallible. Say that, on any point that he is anxious about, the Romanist is dissatisfied with the deliverance of his priest, he may indeed go from him to his bishop, and possibly the bishop may give him a deliverance and a catechism for his guidance. But the bishop if pressed to say whether his own deliverance may be regarded as infallible will be obliged to confess that neither he nor his catechism is infallible, any more than the priest originally consulted. Nor are matters mended by leaving the bishop for an archbishop, or a cardinal, or the Pope himself, or the conclave, or the whole Court of Rome. Before the inquirer can obtain a deliverance, which, ac-

* Deut. xxx. 11.

cording to the principles of the Church of Rome, shall be certainly infallible, a general council must be called. But this, of course, is as unavailable to the anxious inquirer as if there were no such infallible, but last resort. Moreover, this admission of the infallibility of general councils is a statement which, after all, will not bear examination. For, on the one hand, there have been general councils whose decisions have been rejected; and, on the other, when, we ask, who is it, or what is it that receives, and of course considers the decrees of general councils, and consents to receive them as infallible, we can get no other answer but that it is the church—the church. Is the church then an authority distinct from that of a general council? What is it? No Romanist has as yet been able to tell. The truth is, that supposing there were infallibility in the Church of Rome, still it would be impossible to submit oneself to it in practice, for no one can tell where the infallible authority resides. In point of fact, the infallible guidance which the Church of Rome promises to her votaries, is nothing better than the opinion of the individual priest who is consulted. And if, indeed, it be not the truth itself that the inquirer is seeking, but only some authority which it will be safe for him to rest in, according to the principles of the church, then, in that case, his own priest is duly charged and authorized by the Church to teach him; and in his instruction he may at once rest more becomingly than any where else. But, in this case, it is no longer concerning truth, but only peace of mind, that inquiry is made. Moreover, the serious inquirer, who has the Bible in his possession, will not feel altogether at liberty to close it and go to a priest, especially when he recollects such words of our Saviour as these: "They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them."* When he recollects that the

* Luke xvi. 29.

sacred volume is given as the charter between the priesthood and the people in such words as these: "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."* He will not feel very able to rest satisfied with the mere dicta of his teacher, especially when he learns that at certain epochs of the Jewish church, which in the early ages of its history produced miracles and other sure evidences of infallibility, the teachers were such, that from the least of them even unto the greatest of them, every one was given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest, every one decided falsely, that they healed also the hurt of the daughter of the people of God slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there was no peace.†

The whole semblance of strength—the whole plausibility of the Church of Rome, consists in a dexterous substitution of itself exclusively in the place of the catholic church, the universal church, which, as has already been shewn, is, according to the Council of Trent itself, invisible. With regard to the Catholic church, it may, in one of its branches at least, be truly said to be infallible, and that in the sense of being above the hazard of erring, since it embraces the saints in glory, as well as those who are now militant with error in the world. But there is much that is true of the catholic church viewed as a whole, which cannot be truly maintained in reference to any particular church. Particular churches are, to the whole, the universal or catholic church, what particular races of men are to the whole of humanity. And, as many things may be predicated of humanity as a whole, and in the abstract, which cannot be affirmed of any individual race of men, so may many things be predicated of the catholic church, which cannot be affirmed of any particular or visible church,

* Isaiah, viii. 20. † Jeremiah, vi. 13.

whether Romish or Protestant. Of the catholic church, not only may infallibility, and that in a high sense, be affirmed, but final triumph also. When the apostle Peter made the glorious confession, "Thou art THE CHRIST THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD, Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed IT unto thee, but my father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon THIS ROCK I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." In these words, so often quoted, infallibility in a high sense is promised by the Saviour,—infallibility in point of duration to the church,—infallibility as to the keys, and binding and loosing to the apostle Peter. But infallibility is not promised to any particular church, only to Christ's Church, as a whole, or an unity. "Upon this rock," says our Saviour, "I will build MY CHURCH"—which words, tracing the reference to its fountain, and the pronoun to its noun, lead us to the Christ the Son of the living God, as the rock (πέτρα) on which the church was to be built, and to Peter (πέτρος) as a stone, a constituent part holding a prominent place in that church.

Now, while touching on this often quoted passage, it may be remarked, that there is ample room for discussion as to what is implied in these words respecting Peter; but there is scarcely any room for doubt as to what is implied in the promise, that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church. And indeed, what can be a more explicit commentary on this passage, than the following words of our Saviour:—"I know my sheep, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out

of my hand. My father, which gave me them, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."*

Another of the few passages of scripture which the Church of Rome finds available for setting off its claim to infallibility, is the promise of our Saviour to be with his apostles till the end of the world. The passage of scripture is in these terms:—"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain, where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."† From these words we learn that Jesus Christ sent the eleven apostles as his ambassadors to all men. From them the whole world was to learn the doctrine of salvation, and the laws of the kingdom of God. What a charge! what an undertaking! Well might they say, who is sufficient for these things! If some of them "doubted" before this charge was given, how little heart must they have for such a mission! How distrustful of their ability must even the best disposed have felt! But our Saviour immediately removes all their doubts, and their disabilities. "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." And this promise not only sustained the apostles in their day, and enabled them to achieve wonders, but still holds true, and literally extends to us; for though the apostles themselves have long since been taken from this scene, their ministry still exists in the sacred writings, and the spirit of Christ is with them there,

* John x. 27. † Matt. xxviii. 19.

and daily blesses them to the conversion of sinners, and the edification of saints all over the world. Thus, it appears that this promise was made to the apostles, and that it has been fully realized in reference to them. But say that we extend it, so as to believe it equally good in reference to every successful teacher of the truth,—and this we safely may do, since, whether in virtue of this promise or not, certain it is that Christ is with every such teacher of his word,—still, how can such a substitution be made as to appropriate this promise to the Church of Rome exclusively? and, even granting it to apply to that church exclusively, what warrant does it give for infallibility? Plainly to argue infallibility from such words, is a fetch which reason never can assent to.

The only other passage of scripture which the Romanist can find to assist his pretensions, is in the First Epistle of Paul to Timothy. This epistle, the apostle informs us, he wrote, in order to teach Timothy how he ought to behave himself in the house of God, which (says he), "is the Church of the living God;" "the pillar and ground of the truth;" and in these words, say the Romanist, we find an intimation of our infallibility. But even taking these words in the connection in which they are here given, it is plain that they do not teach the infallibility of the Church of Rome in any sense. For it is obvious that they refer to the church where Timothy then was. But he was then at Ephesus. They refer, therefore, to that church. But since many errors soon crept into that church, and it no longer exists, these words cannot imply infallibility, either as to duration or doctrine. Viewed in connection with the preceding words, as we have here given them, and applied to the church as they most generally are, they are indeed full of a beautiful meaning. They are calculated to remind every Church of Christ, not of its rights, but of its duty. They remind us of the

fact, that every church is a pillar reared up in the midst of the darkness of this world, bearing the word of the Lord to men. And every church ought to remember that not to keep up or hide, but to give forth that light is its especial calling. These words, therefore, when viewed in connection with the church, rather condemn the Church of Rome, than support its claims to infallibility.

In many Greek Testaments, however, the text is pointed so as to withdraw these words from their connection with what has gone before, and to give them as the introduction to the following deliverance of the apostle. According to this view the whole passage stands thus: "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God. The pillar and ground of the truth, and, without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness:—God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."* According to either connection, the words have a noble meaning. As to which is the true connection, however, no one has any thing to say but the Greek scholar; we will not, therefore, argue in favour of the latter, though, if it be the true one, it saves all comment, because it withdraws the words from the church, and attaches them to that great truth, through which alone, and for the sake of which alone, the church exists.

The few passages which have thus been noticed, exhaust all that the scriptures can be made to contribute to the doctrine of infallibility in the church; and as the evils of such a pretension will fall to be noticed afterwards, when we touch on the subject of Toleration, we may here close this subject, scripture being thus found,

* 1 Tim. iii. 14.

so far as we have gone, in the entire possession of the field.

REASON AND CONSCIENCE.

If we find in scripture, precepts or parables, or historical illustrations, preponderating in favour of an unity of spirit in variety of form, as a constitution of the catholic church, not uncongenial with the spirit of the gospel, and as we see unavoidable to all appearance, at least in such a state of society as that which now prevails in the world, we are safe in calling upon Christians to put away the grudges which they bear towards one another, while it is but prejudice of education, or at best but conscience not yet fully enlightened, that parts them into various communions. We are safe in calling upon them "to receive one another," and to strive together to "maintain the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace." Nay, we are more than safe. All Christians are bound to do so. Harmony, in the mean time, is in that case plainly indicated, as the way to a complete agreement and unity in the end. But if, on the contrary, we find an universal uniformity unconditionally taught in the word of God, every thing must give way before an immediate effort to establish it. In that case, however unattainable in such a state of human nature as the present, such an uniformity over all may appear, however seemingly inappropriate in the present day to such an institution as an universal church, extending over many people, in various states of social development—still all the difficulties which it seems to involve, must be surmounted. All the arguments against it must be rejected. They must all be ascribed to a defect in our intellect, failing in this case, as we may well expect it to do in many cases, when attempting to discover the fitness of the appointments of

the Infinite, who, looking at the end from the beginning, and co-ordinating his designs with infinity and eternity, not with a single point in space and time as we do, may well be expected to transcend in all that He does, the finite comprehensions of such creatures as we are. If an universal uniformity be the revealed will of God, then, however decidedly reason may give the preference to something else, still, in that case, her first act, in order to entitle her to the name of reason, were to suspect either her own processes or the data on which she proceeded; her first duty were to discover, or at least admit, that she was wrong.

Reason can only be the handmaid, not the mistress, of revelation. But as the handmaid, she can do very much for the advancement of the truth. In fact, though the primary object of the gospel revelation be to make known the salvation of man by Jesus Christ, yet, in all that is secondary, and relating to this world, revelation consists much more in the bringing to light of those great principles of piety and morality, which are necessary for the enlightenment of reason and conscience, than in the laying down of particular laws, calculated to supersede the activities of these heaven-born principles. There are certain states of mind, indeed, when positive precepts are indispensable, in order to a pious and virtuous life. And when such states of mind existed, and such precepts were needed, they have not been withheld. Positive precepts were needed by the Israelites, for instance, just emancipated from the degrading bondage of Egypt; for in that people, at that time, reason and conscience were at zero, and would scarcely be trusted for anything. And accordingly, we find a very ample code of ordinances in the institutes of Moses. And yet, as if to intimate that a positive precept should always be something more also than a mere positive precept, and have a spirit as well as

a mere body, these ordinances were also made types, so that they are not positive precepts merely, but beautiful symbolic pictures also, figuring to those to whom they were given, the evangelical principles and economy, which were to be fully developed only in an age long after. Yet, high as their nature thus was, they were not intended to last for ever. They were, in fact, a ministry designed for the infancy of the church only. And as there was an infancy of the church then, so was there a manhood to follow thereafter. As the people of God were placed under a schoolmaster then, so did the Son of God set them free thereafter.

But, while it is thus maintained that a grand object of revelation is to enlighten reason, and restore supremacy to conscience, and so to establish Christian liberty, let it never be forgotten that the enlightener is ever superior, and more trustworthy than that which it enlightens; and that in every inquiry, such as that on which we are now entering, the precepts of revelation, when such are to be found in the word of God, are of supreme authority. In reference to all such, reason, if she cannot understand them, or see their fitness, must at least be silent; and conscience, if she cannot feel their justness, must at least maintain their authority.

But are reason and conscience, it may possibly be asked, ever placed in such a predicament by the Word of God that neither can the one understand nor the other approve what revelation propounds? This is a very interesting question, and a few words in answer to it are needful here; for it may be thought by some that in the following work too much is built on the deductions

of reason and the testimony of conscience. The author is, therefore, naturally anxious to point out what he regards as the limits and the proper sphere of these principles.

With regard to the place of reason and conscience, then, it is to be maintained that on all subjects on which the Word of God gives no rule, these instructors give the best, indeed the only trust-worthy guidance. But it is no less true, and needs still more to be considered (for it is not equally assented to), that reason and conscience, however valuable for all practical and many doctrinal purposes, are yet, when unassisted by grace, quite incompetent to appreciate and lay hold of the principles of evangelical religion. Nor is this difficult to be accounted for. Such an incompetency unavoidably results from the fact that reason and conscience were constituted in paradise, while evangelical religion, on the contrary, was not constituted till after the fall. Nor is any disparagement implied in this remark. Evangelical religion, in fact, could not have been constituted sooner; for not till the fall was the element of guilt introduced. Not till the fall, therefore, could religion become sacrificial. But if so, not till the fall could it become evangelical; for sacrifice is the element out of which all that we call evangelical in doctrine is developed. And if reason and conscience when unaided cannot appreciate the doctrine of sacrifice, they must be in the same predicament with respect to the doctrine of the atonement, and all the peculiar doctrines of evangelical religion.

Now, from the circumstance which has been mentioned, (namely, the fact that reason and conscience were organised before the fall, and in relation to a state of innocence and consequently of self-righteousness) it is not to be expected that these powers, in the exercise of their natural functions at least, should be able to understand

the doctrine of sacrifice. It would even be strange if they did. For natural reason being an original endowment of man, an endowment of an unfallen creature, and consequently co-ordinated with a state of innocence, and framed to act in relation to an unfallen or guiltless state, its views are unavoidably those suitable to an unfallen creature. Natural reason, therefore, can only be expected to frame and build up a system of religion, on the hypothesis that the subjects of it are, or at least ought to be, innocent creatures. It cannot be expected to frame and build up, or even acquiesce in a system, of which a first principle is, that the subjects of it are all of them unavoidably and from the first guilty and condemned creatures.

The doctrine of merit and demerit, therefore, of rewards and punishments, of the necessary connection between happiness and holiness and between sin and misery, the principles of natural religion, in short, these are all that are to be looked for from natural reason. The doctrine of the atonement and justification by the merits of another, as it had no place in the economy of man's primeval state, so is it not to be expected that there will be any feelings to respond to it in the primeval mental or moral economy of man, of which natural reason and conscience are the principal elements. The scheme of salvation being a subsidiary system, developed out of the infinite resources of a God of love to meet the emergency into which sin had plunged the world, it is no wonder if both reason and conscience (which are not subsidiary but original faculties) when first addressed on the subject of redemption, should feel themselves strangers to that scheme. Although that scheme was no afterthought with Him who seeth the end from the beginning, and has provided for every thing that we call a contingency from eternity, yet not being manifested and realized till after our moral and mental constitution had been framed and

fixed in favour of other views, the scheme of salvation is in the position of an afterthought with respect to us. And hence, at first sight, it looks more wonderful than true, and strikes the mind as rather revolting than pleasing. Personal merit being the primeval constitution of things,—that constitution which the mind of man was originally framed for,—so the form of the natural mind is naturally all in favour of personal righteousness, as the only ground of acceptance. It is only to be expected, therefore, that the doctrine of vicarious suffering and merit, when first proposed to the unaided mind, should seem destitute of verisimilitude both in the eye of reason and of conscience. Hence it is not to be wondered at that many persons finding these doctrines plainly set forth in the Bible, should reject altogether the claims of that book to be regarded as divine. Nor is it more to be wondered at, if others brought by reason into this dilemma, that they must admit the volume on the ground of its historical evidence, while yet they cannot acquiesce in the doctrines which it seems to set forth, should exert all their ingenuity to explain away these doctrines, and to work round everything into that shape which alone their reason can understand and their conscience approve. Thus it is not to be wondered at, that men going wholly and merely by the guidance of unassisted reason and conscience, fall into infidelity on the one hand, and unitarianism on the other, and engender neology in a hundred forms between. This is only what is to be expected. The peculiar doctrines of the gospel being an order of truths realized only subsequently to the creation, both reason and conscience when left to themselves are too far behind to overtake them—too old to understand them. These principles, therefore, are not and cannot be of themselves adequate to evangelize the soul. And if what has been advanced has been rendered intelligible (in his

endeavours after which the author trusts the reader will excuse his repetition), the reader will admit that it would be strange if they could.

It is certain, however, that many of the most trustworthy among our race do believe the evangelical doctrines, and rejoice in them, and find, in their own happy experience, that however hotly reason and conscience may have once repelled these doctrines, yet they not only acquiesce in them now, but expand with delight in the contemplation of them, and feel as if, when thus engaged, they were rising up towards heaven, and coming even to the embrace of infinity itself.

And how comes this to pass, it may well be asked, if natural reason and conscience be so insufficient for these things, as has just been argued? The Scriptures themselves resolve this question. There we learn, that, in order to enable the reason and conscience of fallen man to embrace the evangelical doctrines, a special dispensation of grace was brought into action at the time that the machinery of salvation was set agoing, a special divine influence is made to bear upon the human soul. In its operation, indeed, this influence is like the wind, which bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh, or whether it goeth; but however impalpable its goings forth, FAITH results. And this principle implanted and bringing forth its fruits, the soul finds itself clinging to certain truths and moral principles, which it repudiated before. And by that faith and these truths sustained and developed in the soul, the whole mental and moral economy is gradually worked into harmony with Revelation. The peculiar doctrines of the gospel, which were at first believed, only because they could no longer be rejected, which were held in darkness within the mind, and in solitary isolation from all other truths, because their har-

mony with them could not be perceived, become gradually invested with the light both of intellectual and moral truth, and begin to fraternize kindly with all other truths. And whereas, at first, they were deemed precious only for the relief they gave the soul anxious about its own salvation, they begin now to be appreciated for the sake of their own moral worth likewise. Not only is the soul able to believe them, in virtue of the faith it possesses, not only does the principle of self-preservation feel safe in resting in them; but now reason and conscience, all, in a word, that is most noble in the soul, begins to embrace them with rapture, and to declare that the gospel scheme is not only a safe haven and sabbath for all the anxieties of a sinner respecting the after-life, but is also the very beauty of holiness.

Such is the progress of the soul under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The principles of reason and conscience, which, as they do not naturally recognise the fall, but, on the contrary, stand up for man's primeval rights, and thus, either openly or secretly, reject the gospel scheme of salvation, experience, as it were, an immersion in a fountain of spiritual light, which the soul has been baptised into, from whence they soon emerge with more than all their original powers. Not that there is any substitution or subversion of these powers,—on the contrary, they are changed only, and changed only in this, that they are strengthened, and put in possession of new facts and views, to form a basis for new reasonings and new convictions. Their knowledge is extended. Their powers are exalted. But the laws they obey, and the functions they perform, are the same as ever. They are regenerated, but not either superseded or subverted. Thus it fully appears, that while this dispensation of the Holy Spirit is altogether indispensable to the man who is to be a believer in salvation, in order that his reason

and conscience may be adapted to his new relation to his God, so peculiarly changed by the fall from what it was at the creation, it equally appears that this, the dispensation of grace, is conducted by God on the same general plan as that of merit, which preceded it in Paradise. Thus, as our belief in first truths, generally, is not the product of reason, but of evidence which is immediate, and which, though we trust entirely, we cannot explain or demonstrate, and which, in a word, is evidently the gift of our Creator; so faith is an analogous gift, only its object is the spiritual, not the natural; it gives substance and evidence to things which are invisible, and seemingly unreal to natural intuition. In a word, faith is to the spiritual world just what common sense is to the natural. And spiritual objects once perceived and believed, hold a place in the mind wholly analogous to that which natural truths and intuitions generally do. Both the natural and the spiritual equally become a field for the exercise and play of reason and conscience. In a christian state of mind, therefore, some intuitions are of nature, and some are of grace; and the latter can no more be dispensed with in order to true religion, than the former can in order to common sense. But these fundamental truths, whether implanted by the power of natural belief or by faith, once possessed, then, all subsequent discoursing in the mind upon them is either an exercise of reason or of conscience. Eventually, therefore, in a right state of grace, it is just as it was in a right state of nature, these principles come to be altogether invaluable, and are constantly called into action.

And, indeed, when we consider the nature and origin of reason and conscience, it is not to be wondered at that all the highest duties, both of thought and action, should be devolved upon them. For, however sadly they may often miscarry when acting in the midst of all our present

embarrassments without, and all our tortuous feelings within, yet, true it is, and of verity, that truth and goodness alone are their proper objects of pursuit. It is also certain that their most general laws are the same in all our race, however much individual men may differ from each other in all other respects. Nay, so far as we can conceive, the laws of reason and conscience must be the same in all intelligences whatever. But if the objects of these principles be truth and goodness; and if their laws be the same throughout the whole universe of spirit, to what do these facts point but to this conclusion, that reason and conscience are reflections in the mirror of the human soul, nay, the inbreathings into the life of man of the Divine mind itself. In maintaining, therefore, the absolute necessity of divine grace and of faith, in order to our being entered in the gospel, it will be perceived that no dishonour is done to reason and conscience, but only that an admission is made that these principles, as they exist in the fallen creature, need an additional stream from the fountain from which they are themselves always flowing, in order to be adapted to a Christian calling, and to be entitled to that supremacy which they always affect, and which they can rightly exercise in the Christian alone. It is just because reason and conscience are rivers of Paradise that another channel needed to be opened for them when man was driven forth.

ON CHRISTIAN LIBERTY.

Reason and conscience, guided by scripture and enlarged by grace, determine Christian liberty, and direct and limit its outgoings. And here let us bestow a few words on the subject of liberty, partly because it may be truly said that the principal office of religion is to regulate hu-

man liberty, and partly in order to prevent those mistakes which an unexplained use of the term might possibly cause in the sequel. It is also a term which stands much in need of explanation. What term in language more ambiguous than the term liberty? How sacred! How profane! What glorious deeds have been achieved —what crimes have been perpetrated, equally in the name of liberty! It is the darling of the human heart, but, like other darlings, has it not often been sadly spoiled, and grown up a very self-willed child? Yes, lawless men, trying to consecrate their evil deeds by the best names they can find for them, have so desecrated the name of liberty, that the best friends of liberty are often the most reluctant to use the term; and many a time the truly pious soul is alarmed at the very mention of it. Nor this without cause. It is no exaggeration to say, that men are not only continually mistaking the true nature of liberty, but actually reversing the use of the term, calling necessity liberty, and liberty necessity.

We do not mean the few philosophers named Necessitarians, who, having filtered and strained their notion of liberty through fold after fold of their understandings, lose it altogether at last, and ultimately cannot collect that there is such a thing as liberty within the sphere of human agency at all. These are but the speculative few, whose aim is theory, not practice—who, at worst, do only mistake, not misuse—who, though their metaphysical chemistry be not powerful enough to disengage the principle of liberty, and present it to the understanding in a separate form, yet feel it, and live like others in the consciousness and use of it; or, if they do not feel that they are free, yet they cannot help acting as if they were, because they do not know, any more than others, that which must be until it has been, and so must choose their steps just like the less metaphysical. In a word, necessitarians

aim at nothing more than a philosophical theory respecting the principle of liberty. They are so far from denying that which all the world calls liberty, that it forms the bases of all their inquiries. The doctrine of necessity, even supposing it just, is but the philosophy of liberty. Let that pass therefore.

Those whom we would charge with rendering this discussion necessary, by perverting the use of the term liberty, are not philosophers. They are men of the world, unquiet spirits, who, either urged by a wild self-will, or a boundless demand for pleasure, or possibly a naked hatred of all control, live in the ridiculous belief, that true liberty consists in the mere absence of external restraint! Such is their notion of liberty. And yet, grant them all permission, still they have nothing in their power but to yield to the arbitrary demands of some tyrant within. But for the law of God I should be free, says one, when he is goaded by the impatience of some consuming lust. But for the laws of the state, I should be free, says another, when he is urged by crime, or possibly by some daring ambition that seeks to make others like himself a slave. Nor is it bad men only who are wanting in freedom. Others, who are in many things much to be commended and admired, are still, in many cases, far from being free men. But for the deadness and backwardness of those around me, who used to be my friends, and the friends of the cause I espouse, I should be free, says one, when he is impelled by the boldness of inconsiderate zeal.—Oh! were I but removed from the chilling influences of vulgar life, I should be free, says another, when he is transported into the more congenial region of his own fancy, on the bliss-exalting wings of enthusiasm. Only free me from the claims this world has on me, and then I shall be free, says another, when he is carried away, in love with the oblivious and mystic sweet-

ness of reverie, and lives to dream, and dreams to live. In a word, each regards himself as not free, only because of some external influence, which alone, as he thinks, prevents his liberty. But, in point of fact, though all such external hindrances were completely swept away from all such persons, still the man of lust, the man of ambition, the man of passion, and not less the man of blind zeal, of esthetic enthusiasm, or of reverie, is just as little free when yielding to the impulse which urges or engrosses him, as the man who sleeps and dreams. There may, indeed, be in the reserve of his constitution, the possibility and the power of liberty. But whether there be so or no, his present indulgence, however sinful or admirable in itself, or in its fruits, is not an exercise of liberty. On the contrary, he is the creature of impulse, and all such impulses, whether tending to the most ignoble or the noblest objects, are of the nature of necessity,—all yielding to them is self abandonment.

True liberty does not consist in indulgence of any kind. If that is to be called liberty at all, it is the liberty of sensitive creatures merely, not of rational. It is not a liberty suitable to him who was made in the image of God. It is not the liberty to which the children of God are called, and wherein they ought to stand fast.* It is not the true liberty with which the Son of God has made his people free.† It is not the perfect law of liberty, wherein whoso continueth is blessed.‡ They who promise themselves liberty in this way, are themselves the slaves of corruption, for, of whatever a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage. §

Instead of lying in indulgence, the first element of all true liberty is self-command. Not until one has acquired the mastery of self, has he ceased to be a slave, and risen

* Gal. v. 1-13.
† John viii. 36.
‡ James i. 25.
§ 2 Peter ii. 19.

to the true rank of a man. Till then he is in chains. They may be chains of gold, or chains of iron; but still they are chains; and he is a slave. Yes, whether it be beauty that fascinates him, or money that engrosses him, or pride that swells him, or bashfulness that unmans him, or ambition that burns him, or indolence that disarms him, or envy that corrodes him, or glory that inflames him, or revenge that maddens him, or tenderness that makes him weak, in each and every case he is constrained. The mastery of self is the first requisite to true liberty.

But the mastery of self is not enough. Not only must we have the *power* to say to each individual appetite or passion, Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther; we must also have the *will* to curb what is excessive, and to cherish and develope what is defective, and so to build up our being in moral symmetry, after the image of God.

Nor are the power and the will enough. In order to guide us aright in all that we will and do, we must also have *knowledge.* But these three are enough. And thus knowledge, will, and power, prove to be the three stamina of liberty; in other words, an enlightened reason, a ruling conscience, and energy of character, render freedom possible to a man; and when to these we add the absence of such external restraints and impositions of mere human authority, as violate the rights of conscience thus enlightened and decided in favour of what is right; so that he who can deliberate wisely, and choose calmly, and decide firmly, is not prevented by force from doing what he proposes; but, on the contrary, is free to act as he judges for the best,—then there is the liberty which is worthy of the name, that liberty which is the calling of the sons of God.

Of this liberty God is both the author and the finisher.

He is its author; for conscience is its asserter. Therefore it comes from God; for of all that is within us, nothing is so much his own voice as conscience. Nor is this all the evidence we have that this liberty comes from God; for all his gifts and revelations to man have ultimately had this for their object, "to grant to us (as it was expressed of the aged Zacharias, when filled with the Holy Ghost), that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness all the days of our life." * To emancipate us from the condemnation of the law, and from the law itself, as the terms of life and death, to set us free from our sins and our sinfulness, in a word, to quicken us, and to call us to the glorious liberty of the sons of God, was the chief end of the gospel, in so far as relates to us.

Nor was it only at the birth of the Messiah that this purpose was heralded,—nor was it only after the incarnation that it was realized. All the saints of God, since the world began, have eaten the same spiritual meat,—have drunk the same spiritual drink. Were we to review the history of the church from first to last, and compare it with that of false religions,—as, indeed, we propose to do afterwards, though very briefly,—we should only establish the delightful discovery, that in the true religion there has always been allowed and enforced more true liberty than in any other religion, which has ever established itself in the world. If we find that the people of God were for a time put under the cloud, under a strict regimen of arbitrary laws, exactly written out, it was only because the law written on their hearts was so sadly obliterated, only because nothing else could so well resist "their lusting after evil things." Yet let it not be thought that these laws had bondage

* Luke i. 74.

for their object. It was far otherwise. God could not even bear that his people should be slaves. "I am Jehovah your God," says He, "which brought you out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bonds of your yoke, and made you to go upright."* This was the object of God with respect to the Israelites; and this is His calling to every man, "that he should go upright."

TOLERATION.

That a man may cease to be a bondman, and be free to "go upright," it is altogether necessary that the supremacy of the individual conscience be fully recognised and admitted. And when a man pleads "conscience" as the authority whose voice he desires to obey, it is altogether necessary, both to the ends of justice and to the speedy coming of the kingdom of truth, that a full toleration be granted to that man, however far his convictions may vary from those which are current at the time, or from the standard which is referred to by others, as the standard of truth. If, indeed, his convictions be such as either to indicate insanity, or to threaten the well-being of society, restraints may and ought to be imposed on him who holds them. In that case, a man, as a member of society, may justly be required to abstain from doing what he would have a right to do, were he an individual dwelling in solitude. Society can exist only by such compromises and concessions on the part of individuals. And when an individual refuses to make the concessions which the well-being of society requires, nothing else can be done but to restrain him or banish him. In all other cases, however, all men are to be tolerated while

* Levit. xxvi. 13.

they do but hold what they conscientiously believe, and do but express what they feel conscientiously called upon to utter and maintain.

While a full toleration is to be granted to the persons holding such opinions, however, there may justly be a full intolerance of the opinions themselves; and the principle of toleration is well understood only when there is a full toleration for such intolerance. This may perhaps sound paradoxical, but yet there is no paradox in the statement. Intolerance must be tolerated. Wherever indeed there is true liberty in the mind, such as has been described in the preceding section, there cannot but be intolerance. Wherever there is *a will* bent upon truth, a *knowledge* of the worth of truth, and *power* or energy in the soul (which, as has already been shewn, are the elements of true liberty), there cannot but arise from the depths of that soul a hatred of falsehood, and an irresistible demand to express that hatred. There cannot but be intolerance of the false. No doubt in an enlightened man, such hatred, such intolerance, will never be felt in reference to matters of mere speculation, of which the wrong side does not contradict any known law of God, whether set forth in nature or in his word,—matters which either way are comparatively trivial in their bearings, both on faith or practice. But in reference to all matters of demonstration, matters which the declarations of revelation, or the laws of reason settle, and which are of important moral or religious bearings, one of the strongest feelings of an energetic and enlightened spirit is intolerance of the error which seeks to rival and supplant the truth. Nor can any thing shew more truly that all virtue has gone out of the soul, than a state of indifference and equanimity, when what is well known to be error is presenting itself to the soul's acceptance with the claims of truth, and asking the soul to reject the truth for its sake.

Intolerance, therefore, is a feeling which both does exist and ought to exist. Not to speak, therefore, of the necessity of toleration for that which has been, is now, and ever shall be so long as man loves truth, if there ought to be toleration for every thing which ought to be, there ought to be toleration for intolerance. Nor is the principle of toleration more than half understood or carried out into practice, till this is granted and acted upon.

But let it never be forgotten, that the intolerance which has been vindicated, is intolerence of that which is false only, or deemed to be so; and that the expressions of intolerance, for which it has been maintained that there ought to be a complete toleration, are expressions directed against things not against persons, against errors either real or supposed, not against the persons or parties who hold these errors believing them to be truths. Such persons have a right to a full toleration, not indeed because they hold errors, but because they hold what they conscientiously believe to be true. To tolerate persons thus holding errors for truths, is not to do homage to error; it is only to refuse to make exceptions to the principle that conscience is always entitled to honour and regard,—the only principle that can ever secure the moral peace of society or hasten the spread of truth.

That the dictates of conscience should in all cases whatever be equally deferred to, and no intolerance exercised towards any individual when he is obeying the commands of his conscience, appears to be a matter of universal right. For if two men are equally sincerely and disinterestedly convinced of the truth, each of his own views, they are surely on the same moral level, and have the same rights to be tolerated. If one of them hold views which are true, the other, views which are erroneous, then the former is indeed on a higher intellectual

level than the latter, and possibly enough his higher intelligence urging his moral feelings, may compel him to feel altogether intolerant of the views of the other, and urge him to express that intolerance with all the energy which deep conviction and impassioned eloquence may command. And in all this there is nothing wrong. It is only when we change our subject, when we leave the errors which we detest, and direct our attacks and vent our hatred on our unhappy fellow-creatures, who hold these errors, and whom we ever ought to love,—it is only then that we violate the principle of toleration. But then we do violate that principle, we sin, and do mischief.

We are intolerant in that case; for the principle of toleration is, that all who are sincerely convinced of the truth of what they hold, be at liberty to hold unmolested what they believe; and when they feel called upon, to maintain their views in such terms as those who differ from them, hold and maintain theirs. No doubt this principle, like every other general principle, has and ever must have its just limitations. Other general principles of paramount authority lie around it, and what is right to be done in any given case, can only be learned by co-ordinating all these general principles, and assigning to each its due share in giving a form to the action contemplated. It is another general principle, for instance, that a government must ever consult to the best of its ability for the well-being of the governed. And this general principle cannot but limit that of toleration, as the latter in like manner limits the principle of government. Thus it is plainly necessary for the well-being of society, that restraints be put on those who disturb its peace and security, who hold and would disseminate seditious or demoralizing principles. Nay, though persons holding such principles should be ready to swear that

they entertain them as their most sincere convictions, that were no sufficient reason why *government* should not restrain and even punish them, if not for holding, yet for propagating them; because, by so doing, they wilfully, if not intentionally, disturb and injure society, and violate that understanding on which society exists. Such outrages must be prevented; and so long as the necessity exists, and other means remain undiscovered, restraint and punishment must and ought to be resorted to.

But in reference to views not attacking the well-being of society, and not owning consequences, which may be said, by those of the other side, to injure society, the principle of toleration demands an equal freedom of expression to all men who conscientiously believe what they desire to maintain; and every man violates this great principle who tries forcibly or passionately to put down the man who differs from him. But as the principle of toleration is only the principle of justice applied to a particular case, the man who violates the former, violates at the same time the latter, and therefore sins, as has been said. If one man were responsible for the opinions of another, though he had in no degree contributed to form or maintain them, the case would be different; at least it would be of far more difficult discussion. But as there is no such vicarious responsibility on the head of man, one man is not called upon to interfere with the sincere opinions of another in any forcible manner, or, indeed, any how against the consent of that other. Nay, not only is he not called upon so to interfere, he acts cruelly and unjustly when he does so. For, as the responsibility of the opinions in question rests on the head of him who holds them (or of those who have led him into the belief of them), it is plainly necessary, in order that this responsibility be rightly acquitted, that no restraint, no force, be applied. To act towards a responsible being in such

a manner, is to take from him rights which his Maker has given him, and to the free exercise of which his God has called him now, and for which He is to call him to account hereafter.

How, then, it may be asked, are we to regulate our conduct as to this matter? How are we to discover what is just in any particular case? To this, it is to be answered, that if in any thing the golden rule can be applied, or ought to be applied, or cannot be violated without sin, it is in reference to differences of opinion. We ought never to do to any one aught that we are not ready to grant that he on his side has a right to do to us. If we do not, in such a case, as we would that others should do unto us, we violate, in reference to them, what we claim as right for ourselves. Since, on their side, however, there are the same rights as on ours, we act unjustly towards others when we act in a manner which we should feel to be intolerant if done to ourselves.

No doubt the question of right is often obscure and difficultly resolvable. But if there be such a thing as right in the world, certainly a man has a right to hold what he cannot but believe, and to maintain that belief when it is assailed. Even though we possessed the attribute of infallibility, it would not cease to be unjust to act intolerantly towards those who differed from us, unless indeed they admitted our infallibility, in which case they might be justly convicted of insanity, since to believe us infallible, and yet to differ from us, were to believe us to be both right and wrong at the same time, which is the part of a madman only. No doubt in the case of our infallibility, we could assure ourselves that he who differed from us was unquestionably in the wrong; but still this assurance contains no warrant for forcibly entering the house of another, or for assaulting him. Except, indeed, in so far as infallibility, more than fallibility, would sup-

ply finer reasons with which to ply affectionately the understanding and conscience of the erring, it were good for nothing as a means for spreading the truth. Nay, if it extended only to points of speculation, and not to conduct too, it were a heavy curse. As to the church, nothing could retard the development of true Christianity in it more, than just a dogmatic infallibility if it possessed it; and nothing could go so far from this day henceforth to fill the blessed ranks of the Redeemer with devoted disciples, united as brethren to obey his voice, and imitate his example, as the deep conviction and continual remembrance of human fallibility in every church, and in every breast. The aspect of holiness, which the most dreadful of crimes may assume, when once the idea of infallibility possesses the mind, is most seducing. It is so ably set forth in the seventh section of the work entitled Spiritual Despotism, by the author of the Natural History of Enthusiasm, that I cannot refrain from referring the reader to it, especially as it shews at the same time so beautifully, yet so condemningly, the claims of popery.

On whatever plea, however, whether that of infallibility or any other, persecution is practised, its inhumanity and injustice are very distinctly taught by its effects. The Church of Rome had recourse to it in order to perpetuate what it regarded as important truth, and to exterminate what it regarded as errors. But did the scheme succeed? No. As the voice of humanity had already become too strong for the empire, so did it in its own time become too strong for the Church of Rome. It happened then, as it always does, that persecution perpetuates the errors, whether real or supposed, which it labours by cruelty to exterminate. None but the base abandon their sincere convictions, because they are threatened with persecution for holding them. The weak may fall away, or keep silence, and the cunning may learn to persuade

themselves that they were wrong before, and thus may change when persecution comes. But what of that? Meantime all the strong are assuming the attitude of heroes, and their ranks purged by the fear of persecution, to a pure condition, cannot be moved but by the successive martyrdom of the whole host. But the martyrdom even of one, makes more converts to his opinions in the coming age, than all the claims to infallibility, and all the zeal and power which led thousands to the stake. Almost any opinion gains ground when those who hold it are persecuted. But when the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached by martyrdom, its progress appears to be wholly irresistible. Never does any church wander farther from the truth as it is in Jesus, than when it becomes the persecutor. Strange that the disciples of Jesus, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, threatened not, but committed himself to him who judgeth righteously*—strange that the followers of the primitive Christians, of whom the leader said, "being reviled, we bless, being persecuted, we suffer it, being defamed, we entreat," should feel called upon, or even safe in acting the intolerant, and in retaliating intolerance. But as it was in the ear of Eve, when the devil was whispering that she should be as a God, so has it ever been since, with all but the few. Each ever tends to esteem himself better than another, and in religion, to deem himself infallible. And in the very proportion that this state of feeling has existed, have the course of the Gospel and the glory of God been hindered, error perpetuated, and heart-burnings and heart-renderings filled the breasts, where the peace of God should have dwelt.

There is no possibility of uprooting from a man's mind the conviction that he ought to believe what his reason

* 1 Peter ii. 23.

and conscience urge upon him as the truth. Every man feels, that if there be such a thing as a right to possession at all, and especially, if a few words written on parchment, can give a right to the possession of houses and lands, much more must conviction in the conscience confer the right of holding what dwells there as the truth. Of all conceivable rights, the strongest is that by which a man is entitled to hold and possess what he believes in his conscience to be true. And it is a most beautiful feature in our moral constitution, that it should be so. It is the most instructive lesson that truth is deserving of the highest honours, and is entitled to all the support and defence which man can give it. When the thing believed is the truth, it is universally admitted that the result is admirable. Are we then to violate this the noblest feature in our being, and to put down conscience from her rightful supremacy, because it unavoidably happens that she is liable not only to maintain truth, but also errors for truth? We have no authority to do so, though it were expedient. Conscience is the mistress of the inner man, the queen of the soul, and to rise up against her is to be guilty of rebellion, is to attempt to frame within our breasts another constitution than that which God has given us. It is, in point of fact, to attempt the impossible. Conscience, however she may be forced and maltreated, continues to testify still. The selfish principle threatened by suffering, may confess and abjure, and smooth it all over; but conscience, all the while, never ceases to remonstrate. Conscience, in so far as she is herself, is altogether untractable. She yields only to truth, or what is passed off upon her as truth.

But since, in consequence of this heroism in the constitution of conscience, error, when believed as truth, is very undesirably honoured, it comes to be a great and most important inquiry, how may such error be uprooted and

replaced by truth? But surely the answer is not difficult; for since conscience is but the moral impulse of approval or disapproval, which accompanies the discoursing of reason when occupied about good and evil, it is plain that conscience can be influenced, not otherwise than by addressing influentially the reason, which, under some moral or intellectual misapprehension, is holding error for truth. And how can reason be addressed influentially? Plainly, not otherwise than by addressing it logically or persuasively. In what way then, are we at liberty as Christian men, or how can we as men of good sense, influence the convictions of others in favour of truth? Plainly, not otherwise than "by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." *

Persecution, how unchristian! It is a first principle of Christianity, that, before we can please God, there must be faith in the heart. But it is obvious, that there can be no true faith in any thing, until we are thoroughly persuaded of that thing in our own mind. Persuasion, therefore, is manifestly the only means of christianizing men. Intolerance of those who hold errors which they conscientiously believe to be truths, persecution, even though carried so far and upon such weak hearts, that it produced in the outward demeanour the semblance of acquiescence in the truth, could still do nothing for the cause of Christ. A forced uniformity of outward expressions were all that it could command, even under the most favourable circumstances. And even to gain such worthless uniformity, true religion must vanish in the duplicate proportion; for wherever there is successful persecution, there must be cruelty on the side of the persecutor, and a base abandonment of conviction on the side of the persecuted, results wholly unchristian, both of them.

* 2 Cor. iv. 2.

Intolerance and persecution always bring down the judgments of God on those who indulge in them. How praiseworthy and devout soever men may be in other respects, yet, if they be intolerant and persecutors, it only needs time for the development of their crime, to shew that God's judgments come either on themselves or on their children.

But though it be so unjust and unreasonable, so pregnant with evils and judgments, intolerance has still many secret advocates, neither unjust nor unreasonable men, and who, far from being of a cruel temper, are desirous only of this, that the gospel of peace may have free course and be glorified. Only on the subject of persecution, their belief continues still to be that of the papacy. They want error away; and so they think to put it down by force, and by annexing pains and penalties to the entertainment of it. Not that they would consent (as the papacy did) to the principle that it is lawful to do evil that good may come. They view the sufferings which they purpose to bring on those who are in error, as punishments which the erring deserve. They only omit to inquire whether they have a right to usurp the place of God; and, in the face of the remonstrances of a man's conscience, which is the voice of God to him, to inflict punishments on him for the uncontrollable utterance of that voice. This is indeed very wrong. But, at the same time, persecuting spirits are often to be charged rather with certain moral blunders, and intellectual fallacies, than with any thing that could be called wickedness. There are especially two fallacies, which, could they be but uprooted from their convictions, they would cease to persecute. Of these, the one is the supposing that the truth may be spread by the persecution of those who are in error; and the other is a want of faith in the power of truth, a want of conviction of the fact, that the truth, if

only fair play were given it by the principle of toleration being fully carried out, would spread faster in the hearts of men than in any other conceivable way.

Now, on the former of these fallacies, let what has been said already suffice; but let us here contemplate for a moment what the result would be as to the spread of the truth, if only every sincere man could assure himself, as the privilege and honour due to his conscientious convictions, of a benignant toleration from the friends of the truth. What, let me ask, would be the effect of such treatment. Would there not immediately, on his experiencing it, arise in the breast of him who was so treated, a prepossession in favour of those opinions which rendered so honourable in his eyes the conduct of those who professed to be actuated by them. This result may be confidently expected from the responsive character of human nature. Nor let this be called an attempt to spread the truth by flattering those who are in error. There is no flattery in the case. There is nothing more or less than justice. Those who hold error for truth, have the common rights of men as well as those who commit no mistake in the matter. And it is but just that their rights should be respected. And this will ever be so inveterately their claim, that they will never take any thing well from the man who begins his message to them by disregarding their rights; nay, they will not give him credit for any kind intention. Let him be just before he be generous will be the universal voice of all who are treated with intolerance by one who professes to seek their well-being. A strange way this (they will say) to gain us to your opinions, or to commend your opinions to us by trampling on our rights in the first place! If you love us as you pretend, and desire to turn us from what you conceive to be the error of our ways, shew that you respect us. Respect our rights, and then

we will possibly listen to you; but not till then. Such is the language of the heart of man; and so long as a man can command the use of his own ears, and close them when he pleases, it is all in vain to contend against such a remonstrance, coming as it does from the very depths of humanity. And thus to be intolerant and to persecute, or to do other than respect to the full the rights of those who are in error, is the direct way to make them blind and deaf to the truth, and to place ourselves as stumbling blocks in the way of its propagation. To meet the erring in the opposite spirit, on the contrary, is to gain their good will at once, and to open their hearts, so far as preliminary address can do so, to the reception of the truth.

And this is the only manner of address of which our Saviour and the apostles afford us examples—the apostles at least after they were enlightened in the nature of true religion, and of the tidings of peace on earth which Jesus brought. In the early days of their deep but dark devotedness, two of them did indeed ask leave to call down fire to consume the unkind and heretical Samaritans, but our Saviour answered, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."* And this, the spirit of Christ, they learned more and more fully to breathe, the longer they served in the cause of God on earth. And so will every man who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and seeks the salvation of those who are perishing around him.

UNITY AND UNIFORMITY.

And now, having thus cleared our way, and laid down these principles, let us make a step towards the details of our inquiry.

It follows, from what has been already said, that the

* Luke, ix. 55.

word of God, interpreted by reason and conscience assisted by divine grace, remains in the entire possession of the field, as the only rule of faith, and the supreme authority in every question touching revealed religion. In attempting to discover, therefore, what God has revealed as to the unity or uniformity of the church, let us first attend to the law and to the testimony. "He who speaketh not according to this word, it is because there is no light in him."*

Now, if, in pursuit of this object, we open the Bible even in a few places only, we shall do enough to discover that the word of God emphatically teaches and commends a true unity among all Christians. It represents all as one flock, under one shepherd;† all as fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom all are builded together for a habitation of God through the spirit.‡ It represents all as members in the same body,§ branches in the same vine;‖ in a word, the Bible every where, and in every variety of speech, teaches and inculcates the unity of the church.

And while the people of God are thus described as one, and the church as an united body, a house built upon a rock, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail,¶ means have also been divinely provided for accomplishing the end which has been ordained. Thus love, that heavenly principle of union, is exalted in the New Testament, so as to be given as the very criterion of Christian discipleship. "By this," says our Saviour, "shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another."** Thus a bond of unity is given to the

* Isaiah, viii. 20. † John, x. 16. ‡ Eph. ii. 19.
§ Eph. Col. passim. ‖ John, xv. 1. ¶ Matt. xvi. 18.
** John, xiii. 35.

affections. Nor is it given to them only, but to the intellect too. For there are given unto all, "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."* Nor is this the whole that has been done to secure the unity of the church. It might, indeed, have been thought that our affections and intellect being thus supplied with the materials of unity, the unity of the church might have been intrusted to these principles. But it is not so. Christian unity appears to be a matter of too much importance in the eye of God to be intrusted to mere man. Our heavenly Father has put it on another footing altogether. Instead of leaving it to the play of our mutable reason and affections, he has himself instituted an unity in the church, which is at once spiritual and indefeasible. He has made every true believer, and consequently every true member of the church, to depend for his very faith, and, consequently, for true membership, on union with himself. He has organized the church, so that every member shall meet in himself, as buds and branches meet in the vine. He has instituted a true unity in the church, which no man can destroy. A man may indeed cut himself off; but the body remains unharmed by him. A man, by indulging in a schismatic temper, may greatly injure his spiritual health and life, and may so separate and divide the visible bonds of the church, that it may seem to be really divided. But though one may say "I am not of the body," and another, "I have no need of you," the church is not necessarily divided notwithstanding. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? Man, who looketh only on the outward appearance, often arrives at different conclusions from what he would do, if he could look to the heart. The truth is often one at heart, where it seems divided on the surface.

* Eph. iv. 6.

Nor is it by his spirit only, generating Christian graces in all his people, that the Saviour has made the church one. By shedding his own blood for the sins of all, and sprinkling and purifying the souls of all therewith, He has made all Christians to be in a manner of one blood. In short, the unity of the church is a fact which God has firmly fixed, and a doctrine which the Bible leaves no room to doubt. But let us not enter more minutely on this subject here, for here we should require to give as mere assertions, what will follow as easy demonstrations afterwards.

But here let us not fail to request the reader to remark, that where *mind* is concerned as well as *matter*, and especially where it constitutes the greater and the better part, as in the church, there is a strong necessity for marking well the difference between *unity* and *uniformity*. There is a wide difference between the import of the two terms. Uniformity, in fact, is a word, which, viewed in relation to its strict signification, cannot be applied with propriety to mind at all. In strict propriety, uniformity is a term which can only be applied to things visible, or at least extended; for uniformity plainly means oneness or sameness in form. But it is extended objects only that truly possess form. Such objects, therefore, are alone capable of having oneness or sameness of form predicated of them.

Unity, on the other hand, is a term so peculiarly appropriate to mind, that, however great the variety of the gifts and graces of any individual mind, it still possesses, and ever must possess, a true and indefeasible unity in the midst of all. This fact, then, that in things spiritual there may be a true unity, where there is a variety of gifts and manifestations, makes it incumbent on the intelligent inquirer into the truth revealed as to the unity of the church, to observe attentively whether the descriptions and illustrations which accompany the doctrines of

Christian unity, as set forth in the word of God, convey the idea of an absolute unity or uniformity all over, or rather of an unity in variety, such as the individual mind itself possesses.

Nor is it enough to observe attentively the language of scripture. In order to a just interpretation of it in reference to this particular question, it is necessary that the reader be on his guard against a strong prepossession in favour of uniformity, which, in consequence of both a bad habit, and an original peculiarity in the human mind, is almost sure to actuate him. So strong, indeed, is this prepossession in favour of an universal uniformity in religion, that were almost any one asked his idea, as to the true unity of the church, and as to what ought to be done in order to promote it, not only would he say that he conceived, that, in order to true unity, all churches must resemble each other in ritual, creed, discipline, polity, in a word, every particular; but that, if the unity of the church is our object, our endeavours ought all to be directed towards reducing all variations, and establishing an universal uniformity over all. Such would, I believe, be the answer very generally given to the questions, what is true Christian unity? and what ought to be done in order to promote it? But however prevalent such a notion may be, is there not room for supposing, that, even granting an universal uniformity to be the beau-ideal of Christian unity, and the limit to be looked to, still, it will best be arrived at, and most surely attained in the end, by cultivating and cherishing now that unity of a more spiritual kind, which is possible, and which, in fact, necessarily exists already, wherever there are the graces of the Spirit? However beautiful an universal uniformity would be—however suitable for the church when the time for it comes, yet if, as has been already stated, and as will appear more fully hereafter, the bond of unity in the church

be truly of a spiritual and hidden nature, such uniformity, however perfectly established over all, never could form the true bond of union among Christians, never could constitute the essence of Christian unity. Meantime, in a variety of forms and manifestations, such as now exist among evangelical churches, were they all but knit together, so as to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace, would there not be an unity of a high order, an unity eminently spiritual, and in harmony with the economy of the gospel, and in many respects fit and commendable in relation to the present age of the world, which displays great variety every where? Each church being permitted to use, without reproach or interference, its own unimportant variations, and the whole church dwelling together in love, would not the points on which all agree be brought into greater prominence? And since these points are the essentials of salvation,—the doctrine of man's lost state by nature, his redemption by Christ, and his regeneration by the Holy Spirit,—would not the fixing the attention of Christians more upon these, tend eminently to the progress of vital religion? And while Christians contemplated the points wherein they agreed rather than those wherein they differed, and found that, notwithstanding a difference of denomination, they were already at one about all that is most important, would not this tend greatly to further agreement? Might we not expect to find all good Christians, in these circumstances, willingly permitting denominational distinctions to pass into oblivion? In a word, might we not reasonably hope to attain an universal uniformity in this way far sooner than by legislation, or force, or polemics of any kind?

THE SUBSTITUTION.

As has been said, however, there is, in the breasts of almost all Christians, an impatient demand for uniformity,

and a constant tendency to substitute this idea for that of unity in reference to the church. It has also been said, that this is due to a bad habit in the mind, and now is the time for saying a few words on this subject; for it will be a pity if the reader enter on an examination of Scripture, prepossessed in favour of uniformity, and ever tending to regard it as one and the same thing with unity; while yet, in point of fact, there is a marked difference between the two things, and his prepossession the fruit of a feeling, which a few words here may make plain, and put him on his guard against. Let us therefore devote a few words to the subject of this substitution here; and let the reader bear with me if my remarks appear a little metaphysical, for it is not possible to examine the processes, and detect the fallacies of the human mind, otherwise than by looking into it. And why should we not look into it? There is nothing more to be regretted in our country at the present moment than the exclusive taste of the public for physics, and its impatience under any thing relating to the philosophy of mind. But to the point.

The substitution of the idea of uniformity for that of unity is extremely natural. Thus, when any truth is proposed to the mind, we commonly open first the *imagination* to it, and try to entertain it there. In a word, we try to *imagine* it. But this we cannot do, unless it be an object which has a form, and, consequently, admits of an *image;* for the imagination is conversant only about form-possessing objects, or rather their images. Those objects, therefore, which are truly formless, cannot be entertained in the imagination. But all purely spiritual objects are of this kind. Such objects, for instance, as goodness, mercy, truth, eternity, power, God, have no forms, and therefore they cannot be entertained in the imagination. Merely to open the imagination to such objects, therefore,

is to give them a bad reception. It is to offer them an invitation which they cannot accept.

What then, it may be asked, is to be done with such objects when they are presented to the mind? To this it is to be answered, that they ought to be immediately conducted to the inner audience chambers of reason and conscience. There a *formal dress* is not required in order to their being well received. Nay, the very want of it, the very formlessness of an object invests it in the eyes of reason and conscience with a peculiar charm; for these truly noble ministers of the soul are ever seeking converse with the infinite; and of the infinite, formlessness is peculiarly the characteristic; and, therefore, all that is formless, as allied to the infinite, is congenial and dear to them.

The formlessness of an object, therefore, though against it as an element for poetry, which addresses the imagination, and dwells in the region of taste and sense, is altogether in its favour as an element for pure and spiritual religion. For pure and spiritual religion addresses the reason and conscience, and dwells in the region of the devotional and the sublime, rather than that of the simply beautiful and the finite. Such is the state of the case. But though it were, doubtless, much to be desired, that reason and conscience, and pure and spiritual religion, were every where supreme, yet in this world of ours it has always been, and is now, far otherwise. The mind of the mass is little more than mere imagination; what they cannot *figure* to themselves, they cannot either feel or believe—so low does intellect fall when left to the dominion of ignorance. Hence, every object of the spiritual world proposed for man's acceptance and contemplation, tends, when entertained in his carnal mind, to be reduced to a figure. And the religion of all mankind (except those who have been kept in some measure spiri-

tual by the peculiar power of God) has ever degenerated in all ages and nations into image-worship and idolatry. Nor, indeed, has even the true church been free from this fault in any commendable degree. On the contrary, in the church, as in the world, imagination has ever tended to supersede reason and conscience, and to usurp the supremacy of the mind. The visible church, just like the heathen, instead of piercing to the spirit and the truth of the matter, has even tended to rest in symbols; instead of sustaining the adoration of the invisible God, has even tended to degenerate into image-worship and idolatry. Of this melancholy fact, history supplies continually renewed illustrations. Thus, though Moses divinely guided, suited his instructions to the impression which Egypt had made on the posterity of Abraham, and to the intellectual and moral infancy into which long years of abject slavery among idolaters had plunged them; though he gave them a ritual beautifully calculated to engage in the worship of the true God, their imagination, as well as what reason and conscience they had; and though he forbade with peculiar emphasis all divination, and the making and worshipping of images, still the people fell again and again into idolatry, and went about consulting those who had familiar spirits! And though our Saviour and the apostles, addressing the church in an after age, when it had arrived at manhood, called upon all true worshippers to part henceforth with a symbolic ritual, "which stood only in meats and drinks and diverse washings and carnal ordinances imposed on them till the time of reformation, and was intended only as a necessary bondage under the elements of the world" for those "who were as yet only children" and "heirs under age;" and though, instead thereof, he required them to practise and enjoy the direct worship of the God who is a spirit in spirit and in truth, still the church obeyed its

calling for a few years only. The simplicity and spirituality of primitive Christianity was soon lost. The simple worship, the prayer, the discourse, the psalm, the hymn were soon buried in a mass of gorgeous symbolism, partly borrowed from the old dispensation, partly from the surrounding idolatry; and, strange to say, this is the state of things which predominates in Christendom even to the present day.

Such is the inveterate determination of the human mind towards substituting the material for the mental, the carnal for the spiritual, the visible for the invisible, the form for the power. In reference to the point to be proved then, are we not to expect generally that men, conscious that there ought to be unity in the church, should ever tend to substitute an outward unity instead of an inner unity, an unity of forms instead of an unity in power, in one word, uniformity instead of unity in spirit.

THE PREPOSSESSION.

But while this general tendency to materialize every thing accounts for the substitution of the idea of uniformity instead of unity, another feature in our intellectual constitution also prompts to that prepossession in favour of an universal uniformity, which we are now inquiring into. Not only after having learned that there ought to be unity, do we naturally substitute the uniform for the united, but there is, in our intellectual constitution, a principle which engages us in the love of the uniform, and prompts us to desire it, previously to all inquiry whether it ought to be or not. The long neglected, but much to be admired Vico, gives it as one of the axioms of the philosophy of history, that the human

mind naturally loves the uniform. And no wonder that universal history exemplifies this truth. In fact, the love of the uniform springs from the very form, or rather forms the very spring, of our intellectual constitution. For uniformity is order; the love of uniformity is the love of order; and there is no principle in the human mind so strong, as the love of order. At first, perhaps, the reader may not admit this, feeling, as every one must, that, of all the creatures of God, man is the most disorderly. But the love of order is one thing; the realization of it is another. And notwithstanding man's being so disorderly, yet his intellectual love of order is extreme. This is certain, and is easily proved.

A love of order presides over all our mental processes, and determines all our intellectual proceedings. Thus, when any thing is placed before our minds which we do not understand, what urges us to understand it, but, on the one hand, the pain we feel in having to look upon that which appears to us at present to be disorder, and, on the other, the pleasure we anticipate when the disorder shall vanish from it? And that delightful moment when light arises, and the inquirer can say, "Now I understand it," what has he discovered in it? Order; and nothing else. And the pleasure he enjoys at the moment of discovery, and for some time after, whence does it arise? Simply from this, that the mind, hitherto impeded in its activity by the confusion which obstructed it, begins now, on the moment of the discovery of order, to develope itself, arranging and adjusting, as it expands, all its ideas, in harmony with the order it has discovered. All pain is caused by disorder. And all such happiness as is wholly pure and disinterested, consists either in the development of order out of confusion, or in the discovery or contemplation of order pre-existing. And this is one of the many features in the frame of the human mind, which

points so significantly to its divine original, and its high calling. For the mind of God is infinite order. He is the fountain of all order in his creatures; and all sin is but disorder. Our inherent love of order, therefore, is one of our noblest intellectual powers.

But it is true of all these powers, that, at present, they work but badly, in consequence of the defective and disordered state of our moral principles. And this same love of order, so noble, so divine in its origin and in its intellectual functions, is, in actual life, but too apt to increase the disorder which it hates and is trying to do away. This unhappy result arises from the fact, that this love of order often comes into play, neither in its intellectual purity, nor associated, as it ever ought to be, with a love of its object, but only as a sturdy demand for order, associated with an overbearing self-love. Both in the church and in the world, this unhappy state of things is constantly occurring. In fact, every language bears an impress of the melancholy truth. For, when we say that any one was *ordered* to do such or such a thing, do we not mean the same as if we said that he was *commanded.* It is this tendency to connect order with force, which is the ruin of unity in many a sphere, and most of all in the Church of Christ. Thus it is, that a man, because he is convinced on his own part, that his own creed, ritual, and church polity are of God, tends to insist upon it as essential to order, that all others should agree with him, tends to look upon all who continue to differ from him as contumacious, and required to be excommunicated or parted from, according as the power lies with him or them. The higher esteem and love which he has for himself than for others, induce him at once to arrogate to himself the right to judge other men's consciences, and to give a judgment against them. But the judgment given being resisted, this same self-esteem is natu-

rally wounded, and, since love for the objects who thus vex him, and disorder his feelings, does not restrain him (there being little or no love in the case), he naturally tends to gratify his injured sensibilities, by proceeding against those who refuse to adopt his views or commands, in hard words or deeds, according as his power extends.

But, meantime, where, it may be asked, are reason and conscience? This is a most interesting question, for here is the strange answer. Reason and conscience, meanwhile testifying (as they ever inherently and unavoidably must), in favour of order, make their appearance on this occasion by the side of the injured feelings; and participating in the excitement and disorder of the mind, as, in virtue of its unity, all its powers must when any one is troubled, they are easily engaged so, as it were, to consecrate the injured feelings, being deceived into the belief at the same time, that they are only testifying in favour of order. And thus it comes to pass, that the man in whom the love of order is strongest, if only he be defective in the elements of humility, or of brotherly love, is apt to become the most violent persecutor, the most determined schismatic;—such havoc of our moral nature do even the best principles make when love is wanting. And, as men of this stamp are not confined to any one church, or any one sect, but are too common everywhere, and over all, there thus tends to be generated on all hands, and not out of the worst elements neither, a spirit of schism and intolerance; and thus on the plea and spring of a sincere love of order, the greatest conceivable disorder is apt to result. Nor this only in the church. From a similar state of things, a parent or a prince, animated by no worse principle than a love of order operating too sharply for the love he has for his children or his subjects, often builds himself up into a tyrant, and his family or kingdom is constituted according to the prin-

ciple of the love of order, instead of the order of love as it ought.* But if the love of order be so strong in our nature as to permit men to think that they are justified, when destroying all unity in the church, all affection in the family, all liberty in the state, need we wonder if it operate in Christians generally, so as to lead them to desire that there should be in religion universally the extreme of order, in other words, a perfect resemblance in all creeds, in all rituals, in all churches, in one word, an universal uniformity?

Such a prepossession in favour of uniformity, is only to be expected, even though there were no other circumstances calculated to foster the prepossession. But there are. Our inheritance conspires with the original frame of our mind to favour the claim. For, previously to the Reformation, the church, directing all its zeal towards externals, insisted upon uniformity to the last degree, and valued itself exceeding (as the Church of Rome still does), on what small success it had in establishing it. And, indeed, its uniformity was the best feature which the church then displayed. For since, in the popular mind in those days, all was ignorance of religion, and consequently, a spiritual unity impossible; better an unity in externals, than no unity at all. But, in these circumstances, it was only to be expected that the first reformers, as they were educated in the church of Rome, would naturally cling to the idea of uniformity, the only good feature in the church they had left; and so would carry their demand for it into the reformed church along with them. But if a demand for uniformity prevailed then, it may be expected to prevail now. For we, admiring the reformers for their great achievements, as we are

* This explains how persecutors and schismatics should not always be the worst of men, and how history should have so much good, as well as bad, to say of Charlemagne, Hildebrande, Laud, &c.

called upon to do by every sacred recollection, naturally fall into their errors too, and amongst others, therefore, into an exclusive admiration of uniformity.

Add to this the fact, that we are apt to confound uniformity not only with unity, but with harmony; and that the idea of harmony is never so sweet to the soul as in the midst of discord; and reasons enough will appear, why the prepossession in favour of uniformity (felt if not expressed), should be so strong in the church in the present day, as we may be conscious of finding it in ourselves, and of observing it to be in others.

The prevalence of an opinion, however, is plainly no warrant for its justness, even when it cannot be traced to a fallacy. Have we not occasion every day to speak of prevalent errors? And, in the present case, ought more than the least possible weight to be attached to the mere prevalence of a demand for uniformity, since it has been shewn that such a demand might be expected from *a priori* considerations, independent altogether of the particular state of the case.

THE QUESTION.

The testimony of Scripture; the suitableness or unsuitableness of an universal uniformity to such an institution as an universal church, in the present state of humanity; its harmony or discordance with the analogy of nature and providence; its moral beauty or deformity; its reasonableness; its practicability,—these are the considerations which ought to decide our judgment in such a matter. Emancipating ourselves, therefore, from all fallacies and unreasonable prepossessions, let us now inquire successively into these grounds of opinion, and see whether they point to an universal uniformity in religion

as that which is alone to be tolerated, and to be directly aimed at; or whether they do not rather teach, that an unity of spirit, in variety of form, such as is immediately attainable (and, in fact, exists, were but a great movement of mutual esteem and love to be made by all the evangelical denominations towards each other), is a state of the universal church, not unchristian, not uncongenial with the testimony of scripture, nor with the spirit of the gospel, and, in point of fact, the shortest road to a simpler, a happier, and a more uniform state of things.

PART III.

THE LIGHT OF SACRED HISTORY.

THE BIBLE.

PARADISE.

THE CHERUBIM.

CAIN AND ABEL.

THE ANTEDILUVIAN WORLD.

NOAH.

BABEL.

THE PRIEST.

THE HINDOO.

THE PATRIARCH.

ABRAHAM AND MELCHIZEDEC.

THE EGYPTIANS.

THE ISRAELITES.

GOD'S CHOICE.

THE NECESSITY.

MOSES.

THE JUDGES.

THE LEVITES.

JETHRO.

THE CONSTITUTION.

THE PHARISEE.

THE THEOCRACY.

THE SACRIFICE.

THE MINISTRY.

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

THE MEDIÆVAL CHURCH.

THE CHURCHES OF THE REFORMATION.

THE BIBLE.

The sacred Scriptures teach us the will of God in many ways. They are a manifold revelation. On the one hand, they are gemmed in every page with blessed truths, which radiate a healing virtue on the heart even of him who runneth as he reads. On the other, they consist in a great measure of history, which possesses this value peculiarly its own, that, while it records events, which are in themselves deeply interesting, it communicates also the divine will respecting them. Thus, when the Israelites were in want of water in the wilderness, and (as was usual with them under every privation) were complaining bitterly in consequence, Moses is divinely commanded to assemble the congregation before a certain rock, and is assured, that, in speaking to that rock (doubtless in the name of Jehovah), water would gush out. Accordingly, the congregation is assembled before the rock as commanded. But unhappily, Moses seemingly over-elated by the prospect of performing such a glorious miracle, and impatient at the continual murmurings of the people, instead of addressing them calmly in the name of Jehovah, and merely speaking to the rock as he was commanded, strikes it oftener than once, and uses language to the people full of passion and egotism. " Hear now, ye

rebels," says he, "must we fetch water out of this rock." Such was his intemperate language. And what followed? Immediately the water gushed. God did not stop the miracle, though Moses had sinned grievously in the performance of it. It is not with God as with man, who is ever saying, If you will not do your part, I will not do mine. The miracle went on. But no sooner was it over, than Moses is informed of God, and we by him, that God was highly displeased with his conduct.

And so in other cases. The sacred history is peculiarly valuable in this way. While it records events which are in themselves deeply interesting, it records also the approval or disapproval of God,—a feature this in which it stands alone among histories.

It also possesses this feature of peculiar value, that it throws great light on the doctrines and precepts which were delivered during the epoch of the events recorded. For the word of God being a word always spoken in season, never can we, without a knowledge of the state of society which then existed, arrive at a full and just understanding of it. It is not, nor can it be, till after we have discovered what a doctrine of precept was to those to whom it was first addressed, and in whose language alone it was divinely uttered, that we can truly appreciate what it is when brought down to our times, and translated into our language and ideas. In inquiring, therefore, whether an unity of spirit, in variety of form, be not congenial with the constitution of the universal church in the present state of society, or whether an uniformity over all, as absolute as possible, be alone commendable, let us begin by looking to scripture in a historical point of view.

PARADISE.

If we date the commencement of the church from the commencement of the moral history of our race, and look to our first parents in paradise, before sin entered, we shall find no traces there of such positive institutions,* as must always be required where uniformity is to be established. Distinct commands were indeed given, so as to impress man with a sense both of the government and providence of God, and to prevent the idea from ever entering his breast, that he was a creature abandoned to himself. But still every thing was favourable to the full unbosoming and outpouring of the individual heart to God. There were no restraints at that time, preventing a higher for the sake of a lower end. As the sweetest communion, and the holiest worship, seemed attainable, then, so was there no hindrance in the way of any heavenly aspiration. The rubric of our first parents was in their heart. All was true liberty in Paradise.

Notwithstanding the great value in certain circumstances, and the occasional necessity of even a multitude of positive institutions to fallen men, and the ample code of them, which was divinely made for him in an after age, yet in Paradise only two at most were given. And these, in truth, when rightly viewed, declared themselves to be rather the symbolic representatives of a complete system of morality and religion than mere positive institutions. The one was most beautifully suited to the complete education of reason; the other no less, to the

* "Under the name of positive institutions, we comprehend all those impositions and restraints, which, not being suggested to any man by his conscience, and having no necessary and natural connexion with the dictates of that internal monitor, seem to have no importance but what they may derive from the will of a superior who prescribes them."—*Bishop Horsley's Sermons,—see first on Mark* ii. 27.

complete education of conscience. Paradise was indeed a state of peculiar privilege. But that no Christian who truly knows his privileges and prospects as such, would consent to part with them on any terms, or could allow himself to wish (except, perhaps, in a moment of thoughtlessness) that he were other than a Christian, one might be almost tempted to wish that he had lived in Paradise. The notices that we possess of the economy which then subsisted, are indeed but few; yet are they ample enough to present us with a most delightful picture. Adam was only forbidden to eat of the fruit of a single tree. Nor are those taking an enlarged view of the economy under which he was placed, who regard this injunction merely as an arbitrary command, issued solely for the sake of testing his obedience. Doubtless it was calculated to serve this purpose well, and for this purpose, doubtless, it was in part designed. But for this only in part. It had far more in it than this. Such a command, given to an intelligent being, situate as Adam was, has such beautiful relation to the principle of liberty and indulgence; it is so pregnant with instruction, as to the right use and abuse of the creatures of God generally, that out of this single command, it would be easy to develope the whole system of self-denial, and consequently the whole of what is most peculiar in the morality of the cross. In a word, by reflecting upon this single command, the reason of our first parents could have educated itself, so as to have discerned, in all that appertained to them, the fitness of things,—knowledge this, peculiarly valuable in every situation, and peculiarly fit for paradise, because peculiarly full of enjoyment, whether used for contemplation or for guidance.

The other positive institution to which I alluded, was the Sabbath; for there are good arguments for believing that the Sabbath was instituted even in Paradise, and

we may as well assume that it was, since such an hypothesis can in no degree weaken our argument, though the contrary may have been the fact. The arguments which refer the Sabbath to Paradise, are, however, very strong. Thus, both in the second chapter of Genesis, and in the fourth commandment, where the reason is assigned why the Sabbath was instituted, it is referred to the work of creation. The reason of its institution, therefore, existed from the creation. But is it not most reasonable to infer that, similarly to the passover and other Jewish festivals, the Sabbath was instituted as soon as the reason of it existed, that is, as soon as the creation was completed? Harmoniously with such a view, the Levites, in Nehemiah ix. 13. in their prayer, while they say that God *gave* them his laws, change the term, when alluding to the Sabbath, saying that He had notified it, or *made it known*, to them,—language which plainly refers to a law that had pre-existed, though it had possibly been lost, at the time when it was made known again. Much more might be advanced in favour of this view.

The institution of the Sabbath-day, consecrated as that on which God ceased from all his works, surveyed them, and pronounced them all very good, is so well calculated to cherish the spiritual and contemplative life, so beautifully suited to invite the spirit of devotion from the depths of the soul, to rejoice in the light of God's countenance periodically, that no other ordinance can be conceived, at once more conducive to the nourishment of a spirit of piety, and to the supremacy of conscience,—none more congenial to all those thoughts and feelings by which self-improvement proceeds onwards. Volumes could not contain an account of all the advantages that result to the soul from the institution of the Sabbath. It was truly made for man. Even those who, instead of welcoming it, do all

but curse the anticipation of the hallowed morn, are greatly benefited by it when it comes. It does good to all. It brings, as it were, the breath of God even to the nostrils of the most wicked. It is a sore trial to the worldling. He can scarcely defend himself against its influence but by cursing it. And many yield to its blessed influence, and are brought to God by it. And those who go the other way, if they confess at all before they die, generally confess this,—that the neglect and violation of the Sabbath, was the beginning of their strength in crime. Let no one speak against the Sabbath, till he has thought much upon the subject.

The positive precepts of Paradise, therefore, so far as we can learn, when referred to general principles of morality, or, in other words, when moralized, amount to these all-embracing maxims,—BEWARE OF INDULGENCE, and ADORE GOD, maxims in which it might be demonstrated that all true duty, all true happiness, are included; and by which it might be equally shewn that all true liberty must ever be circumscribed.

But the precepts necessary for the admonition and education of reason and conscience thus laid down for our first parents in two positive institutions, all the details of every-day life, were fully committed to their own conduct. A command was given, and that wholly in the form of a command. And this, all independently of its particular nature, was calculated to remind them, as it echoed in their memories, that they were creatures, and that the first article in their calling was obedience to their Creator. But yet, even in this command, very much was left for the discovery of their reason. It went a certain length, but yet it left far more to be understood by them than was expressed in it. In so far as concerned the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it regulated man's manner of living. But, thus taught that one pro-

duct of the earth was injurious, man was left to discover for himself with regard to all others, except fruits, whether they were fit for use or not. His religion, in like manner, was regulated for him so far. The Sabbath was appointed. But as to man's mode of worship, no formal ritual was prescribed. On the contrary, he was required to develope for himself a congenial and suitable Sabbath-service out of the grateful and devotional sentiments of his own heart.

Now, if, in such circumstances, we conceive that, instead of a single pair, there had been thousands of worshippers assembled in many groves all over the East, is it credible that there could have been an universal uniformity over all? An unity of faith, an unity of spirit, a communion among all, there would undoubtedly have been. But when the utterances of thousands of hearts, all individualized and peculiarly strung, freely embodied themselves in unrestrained words, and attitudes, and forms of worship, would there not have been variety too as well as unity? Who can doubt it for a moment?

But not to dwell on this argument, since it stands on a mere hypothesis, and since the melancholy fact is, that the human race fell from innocence, while yet, instead of being thousands, they were only two, let us pass on, repeating only the fact which so fully appears from what has been stated, namely, that when man was innocent, almost every thing was entrusted to his reason and conscience, almost every thing was expected from the piety of his own heart, enlarged and ennobled by immediate converse and communion with God. Such was the state of things in Paradise. And what could be more diverse from that which the church that insists on uniformity,—the church of Rome—presents to us? In that church, the prescribed form, the positive institution, the rubric, is every thing. In Paradise, on the contrary, a sense of God, the

utterance of the heart, spontaneous piety was every thing. In so far, therefore, as the paradisaical state is to be viewed as the limit towards which the gospel is designed to raise those whom it regenerates, it is very certain that the attempt to suppress the dictates of reason and conscience, and the utterance of the heart, in order to gain an universal uniformity in religion, derives no countenance from it.

THE CHERUBIM.

But the dreary hour is come when man, refusing already to remain in the place assigned to him by his Maker, and aspiring to be a god, is "divorced"—is driven forth from Eden; and the cherubim are placed at the east of the garden "to keep the way of the tree of life." Now, whatever view we take of these cherubs; whether we adopt the ordinary view and regard them as actual angelic beings; or prefer the opinions of those who, after having bestowed great pains on the inquiry, regard them as the originals of the cherubim afterwards ordered for the Tabernacle, and believe that they were appointed to keep the way of the tree of life in the same way as the symbolism of the Old Testament economy was; we are equally led to the conclusion, that their office or ministry must have been to quicken conscience, of which their flaming sword (or involving fire) was so apt a representative; and to keep alive a sense of God on those who, but for some such symbolism and memorial of his character might have soon forgotten Him.

Even supposing, as may be maintained with much learning, if not with equal evidence from Scripture, that this place to the East of Eden, where the cherubim were posted, was the spot where resort was made for the primitive worship of God, who, as we know He did after-

wards, may possibly then have communed with the worshippers from between or above the cherubim, still there is nothing in this resorting there for worship, which reason and conscience could not bring about. On the contrary, such a result as the congregating thither of the primitive worshippers, is just what is to be expected, if we suppose them left wholly free to the guidance of these monitors. Thus, suppose there were an object now, whatever its nature, if only it were known to have been placed where it stood by God, who would be contented till he had gone and seen it? And if it were a divine symbol impressed by the Divine presence, whether with life or fire; and especiallyif it told such a tale as the expulsion of man from paradise by the God whom he had justly offended, who could refrain from being moved by devotional feelings in the presence of that object?—who could refrain from kneeling down there to implore pardon, and pray for a way of acceptance? Thus, even supposing it to have been the work and design of God that the first men should come to the east of the Garden of Eden to worship, it would not have needed a positive command to bring them there. Nor could any positive precept have made so sure of their coming, as the curiosity and other motives which the placing of the cherubim would call into action.

This view, if adopted, would enable us also to explain all the leading features of the early idolatries, especially the resemblances among their principal idols; while, with regard to the Mosaic symbolism, the disagreeable idea that much of it was merely adopted from that of Egypt as its prototype, would fall to the ground; because, according to this view, the idolatrous objects of the Egyptians themselves, which are known to have resembled to a considerable extent, certain symbols which Moses was commanded to construct, would be viewed in the light not of originals but spurious representatives of an older symbolism belonging

to the true religion, of which the true forms and symbolic meanings had been lost and corrupted by human depravity. All this would follow if the view which has been given as to the cherubim at the East of Eden being the original Tabernacle of the first worshippers be adopted; for, according to the principles of human nature, it is only to be expected that, in these circumstances, men, as they multiplied and spread, and became more indifferent about Eden and about the cherubs there, would construct representatives of these cherubs at their homes and in their cities, and depart from all truth both as to their forms and signification. In this way the winged figures which we find among the monuments of the ancient Persians and Egyptians, would receive a happy explanation. In a word, in order to account for all the phenomena of the early mythologies, it would only be necessary to consider the workings of natural reason and conscience in fallen man.

Nor let it be advanced as an objection to the views of this work, that it is confessed in the preceding remarks on the cherubim, that there was an uniformity in the primitive worship, because it has been shewn to have been extremely probable that all the worshippers came to the cherubim, and probably expressed there, the same feelings and offered up the same prayers. Such uniformity, an uniformity which results from the spontaneous movements of the hearts of individual worshippers, is not objected to in this work; on the contrary, it is anticipated as one of the most beautiful features of the millenium.

But what, let me ask again, did the cherubim symbolize and represent; and what views respecting the necessity of an uniformity over all the church, or of the sufficiency of an unity of spirit in variety of form does this view of the subject lead to? The prevalent view respecting the cherubim is, that they were angelic beings, or symbolic figures which represented angelic beings. Some

speculators have even maintained that they represent the Godhead itself. Now, of these opinions, the former is not without good arguments in its favour, and ought not to be excluded from our regard. On the contrary let it be received as one of their significations. But when we consider that the living creatures which John saw in his apocalyptic vision,* and which were plainly cherubic emblems, fell down along with the elders and joined in the song to the Lamb, ascribing, along with the elders, their own redemption to His blood, we are forced to conclude that whatever the cherubim may have represented besides, they also represented redeemed creatures. And indeed if we suppose that the principal object which the cherubic symbols represented, is the church itself, no symbols could be more significant. Thus they were ordained and presented to the eyes of man as soon as the Church was instituted,† and their office then was just that of the Church in all ages, viz. "to keep the way of the tree of life," to keep off the unprepared, the impenitent, the profane; and to suffer to pass in, to receive and lead "in the way of the tree of life," all that are penitent. Again, their situation in the tabernacle and temple, their being made of the same piece of gold with the covering of the propitiatory, and their looking constantly upon it, are very expressive of the union of the Church with the Redeemer ("our propitiatory"), and of the need the Church has to be covered over with his robe of righteousness, and of looking always stedfastly to him. And, finally, the fact that God always manifested himself from between or above the cherubim, is equally favourable to the same view; for it is in the Church and its members that God does in all ages manifest himself in another way than he does unto the world. All things considered, therefore, it must be admitted that the cherubim

* Rev. v. 9. † Gen. iii. 24.

are at least very significant emblems of the Church. And may we not then regard them as having been symbols of it?

Well, then, supposing they were, what do they teach as to the form of the Church? What do they indicate as to the necessity of uniformity over all, or as to the sufficiency and suitableness of unity of spirit in variety of form? What were their own forms? It is generally agreed that Moses, who writes of cherubim as of objects well known in his times, gives no description of them minute enough to enable us to ascertain what their forms were. But from Ezekiel we learn that a cherub was a figure composed of a single winged body with four heads, that of a lion, of an ox, and of an eagle, united into one with the head of a man.* Now, since we have probably lost for ever the means of ascertaining the hieroglyphic signification of these animals in those times, we ought to speak modestly upon the subject. It is obvious, however, that, while each of these heads is the noblest of the tribe it belongs to, they all vary from one another. It is also to be remarked, that they were all united along with a human head. And on this last no doubt the eye of the observer would rest, as emphatically the head. Thus, viewing the cherubim as symbols of the Church, we are led to view the form of the Church corresponding to it as composed of three forms differing from each other, though each noble in itself, and all united into one by a nobler nature, of which humanity was a characteristic. Now it is certain that all evangelical denominations, however numerous, are but varieties of one or other of three great forms or constitutions of church polity. And thus were these three cemented into one, through "the head," who is also emphatically "the Son of man," should we not have an unity in variety curiously analogous in form to the cherubim? But let us not press a view whose curiosity may justly strike the

* Ezekiel x.

reader more than its versimilitude. Let us disregard it. Let us rest contented with the mere general inference, that if the cherubim symbolize and represent the Church, they indicate, as to its form, that it does not need to be an absolute unity, or to possess an uniformity over all, but that it quadrates completely with its symbol when there is an unity of spirit in variety of form. And thus the cherubim preach to us Catholicity of spirit in a very distinct manner, which we shall find as we proceed, that the whole light of sacred history equally proclaims.

CAIN AND ABEL.

After the Fall, just as before it, so far as we can learn, these elements of catholicity of spirit—reason and conscience, and the spirit of devotion in the heart of the worshipper—were called upon to do almost all that God required of man, both in the conduct of life and of worship. At that melancholy epoch a most important change did indeed take place upon the very essence of all true religion, and consequently in its form. Sin entered, and forthwith worship by sacrifice became necessary. And on this subject, doubtless, the progenitors of the human race received very explicit information from a present and communing God. For reason and conscience, the whole soul indeed needs a new illumination (as I have already endeavoured to shew),* before it can see the necessity of sacrifice, or lay hold of the doctrine of the atonement, or trust in a Redeemer. "We cannot think that cutting the throat of an innocent lamb could enter into the head of Abel, one of so gentle a disposition, as a homage acceptable unto God, had he not been commanded to do it."† There can be no doubt that

* See the article on Grace, page 68.

† Grew's Cosmologia Sacra, Book iv. chap. vii.

our first parents received positive revelations on the subject of sacrifice, and had their worship so far regulated for them. But it appears that the nature and necessity of such offerings explained to them, almost all besides was devolved upon their reason and conscience. In other words a great degree of liberty,—a degree which, in the first instance, proved fatal,—was granted, as to the manner in which such offerings should be made.

The offerings of Cain and Abel fully illustrate this truth. Cain, we are informed, brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord, and Abel the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof.* Now, unless much had been devolved upon reason and conscience, in other words, unless great liberty had been granted even in that part of worship which relates to sacrifice, how could we explain this dissimilarity between the offerings of the two brothers. Had, indeed, both of them been accepted, then we might have assumed that both of them had been commanded. But one only was accepted. The other was refused. Nor can we suppose that the rejection of Cain's offering arose from its having been forbidden; for he seems emulous with his brother, and hopeful that his own offering would prove, at least, as acceptable as the other. It was only after the event had disappointed his unreasonable and proud expectations, that his countenance fell, and his wrath burst forth. Now, if Cain's offering had been forbidden, how could he have expected that it should have been accepted; such an expectation would have been insane. We are, therefore, led to conclude, that its non-acceptance was not on account of its having been a forbidden thing, but because it was (as the Scriptures assure us) an offering of a wicked heart,† an offering not of faith.‡

In truth, Cain's offering was no sacrifice at all. It was

* Gen. iv. 3. 4. † 1 John iii. 12. ‡ Heb. xi. 4.

no act of the religion of a fallen creature. It was not in harmony with the mediatorial scheme, which alone was now the true religion. It neither indicated in the worshipper any confession of sin, nor did it even imply any consciousness of it. As it could not open the way, therefore, so neither did it indicate any fitness for acceptance. It was, even on the most favourable construction as to Cain's motives, no more than a trivial expression of gratitude; and though it had been an offering the most ample and honourable of that sort, still it could never open the way to a sinner's acceptance. For though, doubtless, the favour of God is ever ready to outpour on the heart that is grateful to Him; and though His ear is ever open to accept every act of voluntary worship,* in which spirit and truth preside; yet, in the case of every sinner, his sin must first be put out of the way before communion can take place between him and a holy God. But it forms a first principle of evangelical religion, that in order to this there must be the shedding of blood.† From judicial considerations, therefore, and the first principles of things which, though reason cannot discover, faith can accredit, and which the mercy even of God cannot supersede, Cain's offering could not be accepted. But this is not all

* The statement here made stands in contrast with a statement frequently made by persons who, being pious, are consequently entitled to all regard, namely, when they use the term will-worship, as if there were in the Gospel a passage in which worship, when the offspring of the will, were condemned merely because it was so. On referring to Coloss. ii. and 23d, however, where alone the term will-worship occurs, it will be found that the design of the apostle is not to condemn the worshipping of angels, and abstinence from certain meats, because they were a will-worship, and a semblance of humility merely, but to shew that, though it seemed to be in their favour that they were voluntary acts of worship, and demanded humility, yet their being such did not justify or excuse them, since they were wrong in themselves.

† Heb. ix. 22.

that was against it. Cain was a revengeful and a murderous man. No wonder, therefore, his offering was rejected. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord."* But let us not dwell too long on this most interesting page of sacred history. Ere we leave it, however, let us not fail to observe a fact immediately relating to our inquiry, and which this passage of sacred Scripture teaches, namely, that the first display of the irascible passions which had a fatal issue, took its rise in a religious difference. Alas! how often has the same cause produced the same effects since! It is *natural*, indeed, that differences, in a matter of such deep importance as religion is, should move the passions; but it is *Christian* to keep these passions under. Since the days of Cain, however, till the present day, the spirit of Cain has still dwelt upon the earth,—has still been "a wanderer and a vagabond" over it. It has troubled every region. As, indeed, Abel is the type and representative of the spirit of true piety, so may his elder brother be regarded as the type and representative of religious hatred and persecution. It has been usual to regard him as representing the spirit of the world, and, no doubt, using this term in its widest sense, he did so; for in the spirit of the world, that of religious hatred and persecution is included. But, if any distinction is to be made between the two, the spirit of Cain must be associated with the persecuter rather than with the worldling. He slew his brother, not in order to take possession of any thing that was his, or, indeed, to gain any worldly advantage whatever; he slew him simply because he hated his religion, and the virtues to which it gave birth.

And here let us mark also the result of the assault which Cain made upon Abel,—the assault which hypocrisy, hatred, and dark malignity made upon gentleness,

* Prov. xv. 8.

and love, and enlightened piety. Cain rose up against Abel his brother. Abel fell. And is not this an instance of what may generally be expected in a physical encounter between the children of the light and the children of darkness. To the former, force is not the sphere of victory. Not but they are to defend themselves when attacked, as possibly Abel did. But the weapons of their warfare are not carnal. And all those angry and proud arguments which issue from the carnal heart of the polemic, and of which the religious world is now so full, are weapons of Cain, unchristian and accursed. There are only two ways of it, the spirit of persuasion, and the spirit of the sword; and of these the spirit of persuasion is alone Christian. Yet better far the bright steel, and have done with it, than a foul tongue poisoning the air, from year to year, with its bitter and malignant utterances, and vampire-like seeking to suck out the heart's blood of all who cannot assent to its imperious dictates. What though it utters itself in religious tones and syllables: Is it consecrated, forsooth!

THE ANTEDILUVIAN WORLD.

It is well known, that after the fall, and before the flood, men degenerated, as they multiplied, with marvellous rapidity, and proved themselves, after comparatively few ages, altogether unworthy of the liberty with which they had been entrusted. Instead of maintaining reason and conscience in the supremacy of the soul, which is their only rightful place, mankind speedily plunged into such a state of indulgence, and turned so impious, that God was moved to extirpate the existing population, and to renovate the race. And what is the lesson which such a sad catastrophe is peculiarly designed to teach us?

What were the peculiar faults in the constitution of antediluvian society, through which it hurried so fast into utter perdition? This is a deeply interesting question. It must be confessed, however, that the notices which we have of these times are too slender to admit of a satisfactory solution of it. But from the little that we do know, we may safely infer two causes of the degeneracy of the antediluvians, both of them intimately connected with our subject.

It has been shewn, that, down to the deluge, there were but few positive institutions in religion. Now this state of things,—since it was the original state,—ought to lead us to infer, that, whenever such institutions have been divinely given in after ages, it was only because they were indispensably necessary, not because they are in themselves the choice of God. That God has no pleasure in them, we may indeed well believe, not only from the Scripture history of man, but from their awkwardness as means of securing obedience, compared with the law written on the heart, the law of reason and conscience. At all events, the fact that so few were instituted until after it had been demonstrated that the other method had failed, leads us to infer with certainty that they are to be ascribed to a necessity, rather than a pure preference on the part of God.

The fact of their fewness in the antediluvian world, however, when viewed, not alone, and merely as an evidence of what God designed first to manifest in providence, but when taken in connexion with the lawlessness and impiety with which that fewness was associated, and the sad catastrophe in which the whole economy terminated, ought plainly to prepare us for a greater number of such institutions in after ages.

The fate of the antediluvian world, in which positive institutions appear to have been almost entirely wanting.

teaches distinctly that there are certain states of human nature when but little can be trusted to reason and conscience, and when positive institutions, and effective authority, are the only means by which piety, and even society itself, can be perpetuated. This, then, is one important lesson which the world before the flood has handed down to us.

There is also another feature of these times not unworthy of notice here. In all societies, subsequently to the deluge, which have risen even a single step only in the scale of civilization, wherever, in short, there has been society at all, a class of men has invariably existed, having for their duty to teach religion, and perform the offices of worship. In all ages and countries which have any histories, a priesthood or ministry of some sort or other, is constantly to be found. But amongst the antediluvians, we find no traces of such an order of men. And this fact, whether we regard it as the cause or the effect of their impiety and lawlessness, equally points to this great truth in the philosophy of history, That an order of men set apart for teaching religion, is one of the most essential elements of a well-constituted society. While priestcraft, therefore, is condemned, as the world has too often had good occasion to do, and as we shall take occasion to do in the sequel, let us not condemn the sacerdotal or pastoral institution. Whatever evils may have resulted from its corrupt administration, it is worthy of belief, that no other order of men has done so much, upon the whole, for the well-being of the human species.

NOAH.

But the deluge has swept over the earth. Its ungodly masses of human creatures are no more. The church

is reduced to a single family. Society begins from a new fountain. Noah, and his sons, and his sons' wives, descend from Mount Ararat. And what is the economy which the new order of things presents to our consideration? Are we not to expect that, in order to prevent for the future the indulgence which had ruined the race already, the survivors shall be straitly bound on all hands by positive laws and institutions, so that, for the time to come, as little as possible may be left to reason and conscience, which, though divinely assisted by the immediate communion and guidance of God, had already proved themselves so incompetent to resist the impulses of appetite, and the allurements of sin? This is what might have been expected, not without much shew of reason. But it was not so. Instead of bindings, and restraints, and a manifold exhibition of authority, all the communications which God made to Noah, when the flood was over, were of the nature of promises, and extensions of privilege. The patriarch was, indeed, commanded to refrain from eating life-blood. But this was an ordinance connected with sacrifice; and therefore the fact of such a command being given, is only calculated to illustrate what has been already advanced on this subject, namely, that this part of worship must always be put under positive rule; because, being a matter of faith only, not of nature, reason and conscience are quite incompetent to organize a suitable ritual. It may also be remarked, that the forefending of blood was calculated to have a very admirable effect in restraining the injured from manslaughter, which, in all infant societies, is peculiarly apt to be precipitately committed, because it is not possible, in such times, to establish any other law but that of revenge,—a mode of punishment such that its outgoings can scarcely be regulated. The forbidding of blood was, therefore, a precept which, though positive, was not ar-

bitrary. It was full of significancy, both as to religion and morals. It is to be remarked, moreover, that this restraint was, after all, only the limitation of a privilege newly conferred, namely, the grant of animal food;—a very remarkable grant, since to this day we find animal food strictly forbidden in those regions, by a priesthood so ancient that they refer their laws to a divine sage, who, under the name of Menu, is generally thought by mythologists to be Noah himself.

Whether, therefore, we look to our first parents in paradise, to their immediate posterity, or to the race that survived the deluge, we find that, down to the dispersion of mankind, provision was made for spiritual religion only. Except in what relates to sacrifice, for which, as has been shewn, reason and conscience are wholly insufficient, and positive precepts are indispensable, almost every point of conduct was committed to reason and conscience. In so far, therefore, as a detail of positive regulations are necessary in order to secure an universal uniformity in religion, we are warranted to infer, that no provision was made for such uniformity in the first ages, and that a worship conducted in spirit and in truth, and standing in the free utterance of the heart's devotion, was all that was required, or that belonged to that epoch. The materiel of true catholicity, therefore, existed. And the sons of God, when they met, would recognise each other as brethren, so soon as each saw that the other loved God, and obeyed his voice. There would, therefore, reign in those early days that same spirit which reigned in the breast of the apostle when he said, "Unto all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours, grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." *

* 1 Cor. i. 3.

BABEL.

We may here remark, however, that, not long after the flood, an event occurred, which, according to one view at least, serves well to illustrate the great desire which the human fancy always has for associations of which the charm shall be an universal uniformity, a sameness in lip and word, among all the members.

A section of the family of Noah, disposed to move towards the west (which has generally been the direction in which the human family have spontaneously migrated), left the abode of their forefathers in the east, and, after crossing rivers and mountains, arrived on the plain of Shinar, a territory which, doubtless, was both fertile and beautiful, else they would not have thought of settling there. But there they came and dwelt. And what we have particularly to remark here is, that, when settled there, they formed the resolution to build a city and a tower, with a top unto heaven (for such, rather than as it stands in the public version, is the translation of the Hebrew), that is, most probably, a top to serve for religious purposes, to be the depository of religious symbolism, and the fountain of religious authority. The very short narrative of Scripture does not, indeed, supply us with any details; nor is it a subject on which to dogmatize. But this appears to be the most probable view. Similar towers are found in the east to this day. And every thing prompts to the conclusion, that one of the main objects of the Babel-builders was to erect a temple which might be perpetual, and have such a system of religious worship and symbolism connected with it, as, being uniform over all, might still serve to shew that all the original settlers in the plain of Shinar were one, however much they should be scattered over the whole

earth afterward. "Let us make a name," said they, "lest we be scattered abroad on the face of the whole earth."

Here, then, even in those early days, we find, according to this view, a portion of the family of Noah seeking to make to itself a name, that is, viewing their endeavour as of a religious nature (which no doubt it was in some sort, for in those days every thing was connected with religion, either the true or false, and so it is in the East to this day), seeking to constitute themselves a denomination. Here, in short, even in those early days, is a sect proposing to inclose itself within certain barriers of its own erection, of which the leading features appear to have been a oneness or sameness of "lip" or word and worship, the tower being the depository of the rubric, or rather of the symbols or hieroglyphics in which such worship would no doubt be clothed and preserved. Uniformity over all the sect, then, and a sacred language peculiar to themselves, with all the exclusive feelings in which alone such a system could originate, and which it was designed to perpetuate, appear to have been the objects and the animating principles of the builders of the original Babel. That those who formed such a scheme were also of tyrannical and persecuting dispositions, we may infer, if we take Nimrod, who appears to have been one of the most powerful of the chiefs among them, as a representative of the others. But here let me quote the curious remarks of a recent author, of equal ingenuity and piety, whose view is here presented to the reader. "Although (says Mr Morison) we purpose dividing the subject before us into the several names of the religions which sprung out of the Babel union, rather than into notices of the different kingdoms, and the creed professed by each; yet the brief reference in the Bible to the first potentate of Babylon is so curious, and the kingdom which began with him occupies so

large a space in the prophetic writings, that it seems advisable to devote a few pages to the consideration of the origin and nature of that great Old Testament antichristian power.

It is narrated of Nimrod, in the third generation from Noah, that "he began to be a mighty one in the earth," and as "the beginning of his kingdom," that is, the head or the metropolis of his kingdom, "was Babel," we conclude that he headed the remains of the coalition there; after the sects and parties had been broken off, and had taken their departure to other lands.

The coalition formed by Nimrod extended far, and many great cities rapidly attested the number of his subjects and the extent of his power. After founding four cities in the land of Shinar, he went forth into Assyria and built four there also. When all these cities are enumerated, there is a curious note appended in the text, which seems, in our translation, to apply only to Resen, but which we apprehend refers to the whole Babylonish power. "The same (it is said) is a great city." Now less is heard afterwards of Resen than of the others. The note is literally, "This the city the great." Comparing that note with what is said of spiritual Babylon, Rev. xvii. 18, "The woman that thou sawest is that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth," it may be considered whether the note in Genesis is not applicable to the whole Babylonish dominions; and thus early points it out as the great ancient worldly power which was to stand in contrast with the smallness and comparative weakness of "Jacob the Lord's portion."

The first monarch of this great empire is said to have been "a mighty hunter before the Lord." This is one of the instances in which the translators have chosen the secondary and derivative meaning of a word, instead of its primary signification; one of those unfortunate phrases

which have contributed so much to instil contemptible ideas respecting the early events recorded in the Bible. It might have been expected that if the unlikelihood had not occurred to them of the sacred historian recording that the monarch of an empire so magnificent was so great a hunter that his hunting became a proverb, the phrase "before the Lord" would have set the translators right.*

The original intention of the Babel conspiracy was uniformity "before the Lord" or in religious matters. Nimrod seems to have entered into the scheme with great zeal, and "verily he had his reward." He was a mighty *constrainer* before the Lord, or in the cause of the Lord, and he acquired great fame by it; his efforts were very notable, and it continued a proverb for many ages afterwards, "Even as Nimrod *the great intolerant* before the Lord." Thus early did that great intolerance begin to rear its head which became in process of time "the banner of the whole earth." Thus early did that hunting commence of which it was afterwards said, "Will ye hunt the souls of my people?" "They hunt every man his brother with a net."

We shall not properly estimate the nature of this bigotry and zeal, and the jealousy with which it always looked at "the inheritance of the Lord," without keeping in view the religious origin of the Babylonish kingdom, and the public nature of the call of Abraham, and of the promises given to him and his seed. "The great city Babylon" and its dependencies had their origin while all the earth was at one in religious matters. There was no doubt, therefore, its institutions were founded in truth, and that its doctrines were similar to that professed by the immediate progenitors of Abraham. The scheme, although as formerly noticed, only a section of the great

* This is not good criticism. See page 154.

rise, was still magnificent in its conception, and imposing by the worldly power and grandeur which accompanied it. Founded on such principles, possessed by such power, it assumed the tone of the kingdom of heaven in this world. It not only "sat as a queen," but "lifted itself up to heaven." Babylon became "the praise of the whole earth," and it was said by her and her antitype, "What city is like unto the great city"—her "head" or origin in heaven, her institutions heavenly, her very intolerance a passport to the kingdom of heaven!

It is observable how strict Babel maintained the character of her founder for intolerance even to the very last. Even when Nebuchadnezzar acknowledges the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego — the acknowledgment cannot be made without *a bull;* the confession of the truth cannot be made without a decree; "Therefore, I, Nebuchadnezzar, make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill; because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort."*

Such are the interesting remarks of this author on the "subject of Babel." But let us now observe, that this original attempt after uniformity (if such it really was) completely failed,† and, as we learn from the sacred history, was wholly displeasing to God.

But though the attempt to introduce a self-invented symbolism in worship, and an uniformity over all, was frustrated in this instance, yet it has not always been so. And in almost every community a certain class have succeeded in what the Babel-builders as a body failed.

* See Morison's Religious History of Man, p. 219.

† Gen. xi. 8.

THE PRIEST.

Allusion has already been made to a priesthood laying the people under restraints as to meats, which God gave in free grant to Noah and his posterity, and in them to all mankind. And there is a priesthood in the present day, walking so curiously in the footsteps of those who have gone before them; and though they claim the name of Catholic, yet opposing so strenuously all true catholicity, that it belongs to these pages to touch on this subject. And this is perhaps the best place for doing so; for, already in the family of Noah, in the most remote antiquity to which profane history or tradition can carry us, we find an order of men similar to that which has just been alluded to; we find a regularly constituted priesthood.

Nor is this to be wondered at. The sacerdotal institution is the natural fruit of human nature; and for good or for evil according to circumstances, makes its appearance wherever society possesses any degree of development at all. Man loves power, and needs religion, and these two principles are enough to develope a priesthood in every community. Man loves power; and, generally speaking, every body does what in him lies to become possessed of power. But of all who are aiming at power, especially in a simple and ignorant state of society, the priest is sure to succeed the best. For man feels his need of religion; and history proves, that in such a state of society as has been referred to, there is a constant tendency on the part of the people to refer every display of power, and every unexplained phenomenon, simply and directly to the divine agency. By a felicity of ignorance, its only felicity, simple people pass by all second causes, and, ascending at once to the fountain-head, ascribe all things to God. And this were indeed good,

and, in point of fact, the noblest philosophy, as well as the soundest theology, did they only refrain from ascribing what is sinful to God. But, unfortunately for the cause of truth and morality, simple people make no distinctions. Not discriminating between the divine fountain itself, which pours forth the mighty torrent of life and power always pure, and the creature machinery which that torrent sets agoing and maintains in action, simple people ascribe all to God, the deformed as well as the beautiful, the evil as well as the good. In the early stage of the human mind, there is little reflection and no analysis. All is impression. Philosophy is as yet wholly in the womb of religion. A Pantheism is the universal faith. A Theocracy is the only form of government recognised.

Nor was this feature in the character of man neglected in the councils of Heaven. An epoch in the development of humanity, in many respects so beautiful, was not suffered to pass away without the peculiar voice of Heaven respecting it. God took it up; and by revealing the knowledge of Satan, an agency distinct from his own, and opposed to it, and having for its object the advancement of evil, as his own has the advancement of good, God purged Pantheism of its capital error. And this done, He then became Himself the head of that form of government which has been named, and which is alone congenial with the spirit of primæval times, and the necessities of primæval society. God consecrated the theocratic epoch of the human mind. He gave his chosen people a true theocracy.

But, passing by this idea for the present (afterwards to return to it), and merely calling to mind the tendency of man in a primæval state, to refer every thing to Divine agency, there is in this fact plainly the ground on which an ambitious man may practise with success, in order to attain authority of the highest kind. In order

to this, in fact, it is plain that nothing more is necessary, than that he manage to persuade the people around him, that he is one who communicates more directly than they do with that Divine power, of which they all are already predisposed to be mysteriously and darkly impressed. Such a course, then, being open to ambition, many may be expected to attempt to attain to power and authority in this way, and some to succeed. And thus is the first footstep made towards the existence of a sacerdotal order.

But the talents which are crowned with success in such an enterprise, will be generally sufficient, also, to teach those who are successful, not to quarrel with each other. Nay, since a contradiction of each other, would invalidate the pretensions of all, while, plainly nothing on the other hand, would tend so well as a perfect harmony among them (as if all their utterances were but echoes of the Divine voice), to stamp with the claims of a Divine communication whatever they might give out to the people, we may expect them all to agree with each other, and to work to each other; and, consequently, to form an order by themselves. Thus does a priesthood naturally come into being, and organize itself; and while a certain state of society subsists, thus does it naturally govern the people for good or for evil. And, truly, when an order of religious men, thus enjoying the supremacy, have attained to it by a lawful use of the true religion, and are themselves holy men, seeking the glory of God, the salvation of souls, and the well-being of the society which they preside over; as, for instance, (to mention a modern case), the Polynesian missionaries,—they are of infinite value, and can achieve wonders of good.

But history shews that the sacerdotal order (though with many illustrious exceptions, of course) has resembled all other orders in this, that it has always sought

its own security and aggrandizement as its principal pursuit. Nay, the ministers of Christ have too long shewn the disposition to arrogate to themselves the place of God. The priesthood of the Romish Church represents itself, to this day, as a mediatorial agency, and tries to persuade the faithful in that communion, that it is not from open revelation, or from the voice of reason and conscience, but from the utterances of the priesthood alone, that the will of God is to be learned, and that it is through this channel alone that the favours of heaven are conferred. But, plainly, these extravagant pretensions in a priesthood must cease, wherever that priesthood is animated by the spirit of Christianity. The fact is, that, in the true religion, ever since the true worshippers have constituted nations, God has provided against all dangerous usurpations on the part of the priesthood. Nor need we wonder at this, since it has been every where proved, that excessive power is incompatible with purity and spirituality on the part of those who enjoy it.

Ever since true worshippers constituted nations, God has given a charter between the priesthood and the people,—a charter in which the privileges and duties of both are defined, so that neither can usurp or overbear the other, without sinning against God ; and this is one of the most striking peculiarities in the economics of true religion. During the Theocracy, the law of Moses was the charter. Under Christ, the gospel is. And in all the churches of the Reformation, the Bible is deferred to, both by the ecclesiastic order and the people, as the standard of reference, and the charter between them. It is only since the Reformation, however, that we find the people referred by the ecclesiastics to a higher authority than the utterances of their own order for the truth of what they advance. But these are views which will

not be received merely by the statement of them. They demand a somewhat more full exposition. Let us, therefore, see what an unchartered priesthood tends to. Hence, possibly, we may learn the necessity of a charter such as the Bible has just been described to be.

THE HINDU.

Nowhere do we find a priesthood more fully pronounced in all its arts, or more successful in all its objects, than in the country of Noah in the remotest antiquity to which we can ascend. Not that this fact is to be learned from the sacred history, for between the days of Noah and the call of Abraham, the Pentateuch contains only a very few notices of our race. And not that we pretend access to any other history reaching back to so remote a period. We derive evidence from another source. In the midst of that variety which distinguish all His works, the Creator has imparted to a certain region of the earth, but a little removed from that where Noah's own family appears to have resided, such a genial temperament, that it altogether contents its inhabitants, indisposes them towards change, and having speedily developed society to a certain degree, fixes it there and perpetuates it seemingly for ever. And from such a state of things (aided perhaps by the restriction of the people to a vegetable diet only, a politic law on the part of the priesthood, since such a diet tends to prevent energy in a people, and so to make them easily governed), it has come to pass that the state of things framed and set a-going in that quarter, probably not many centuries after the flood, continues even to this day, more fully developed no doubt, but developed rather than changed. I allude to India and the Hindoos.

Now in that region we find a priesthood (whether itself

of Hindoo origin or not makes no difference) which has existed from the earliest ages, and from a most remote antiquity in India itself, and which has still been engaged in developing and perfecting its own organization, so that at the present day it may be taken as the type and beau ideal of a successful and self-constituted priesthood, and may be viewed as the limit which that order of society naturally tends to, and finds it possible to attain. And as there is no class of men so opposed to the views advocated in this work as such a priesthood (a class unhappily reigning, even in the present day, over a third part of the United Kingdom), I shall here solicit the reader's attention for a little to the consideration of the Brahminical system, that he may be the better able to ascertain, with respect to the Romish system, what part of it is probably human, what part probably divine, and what the regard or disregard to be paid to Romish priests as ministers of true or of false religion, and what the value or valuelessness of that uniformity in religion of which they boast as alone to be found with them.

It will not be denied that Brahminism is an invention of man merely. And though it be granted that in the absence or impossibility of something better it may have served valuable purposes in India, it will not be maintained that the Church of Christ and modern Europe should be governed by Brahminism. On the contrary, we are accustomed to look upon the system that prevails in the east as bad in every feature. There are several points, however, in which the Brahminical priesthood, viewed simply as an institution, and keeping out of view the greater errors in religion with which it is associated, is more to be admired than that of Rome. But, before making such critical remarks, let us see what Brahminism is.

THE BRAHMIN.

What then is a Brahmin—the beau-ideal of a thoroughly educated, unrestrained, and successful priest? This cannot be better learned that from consulting the institutes of Menu, a volume of the priesthood which instructs the people in all that the sacerdotal caste wish them to believe, and which is regarded by all Hindoos as divine. The following extracts will convey a sufficiently definite idea of what the Brahminical priesthood wish the people to believe respecting them, and in what position they desire to be held. Much more of the same kind, and which is equally instructive, will be found in the volume from which the following extracts are made, and which, as it forms one of the volumes of the works of Sir W. Jones, is easily accessible to every one.

1. *The Priesthood have the most divine pedigree, and of all classes of society the greatest dignity.*

"That the human race may be multiplied, he (Menu) caused the Brahmin, the Cshatriya, the Vaisya, and the Sudra (so named from scripture, Protection, Wealth, and Labour, and the names of the four castes, the religious, the military, the commercial, and the labouring) to proceed from his mouth, his arm, his thigh, and his foot." . . . . "Since the Brahmin sprang from the most excellent part, since he was the first born, and since he possesses the Veda (the scriptures) he is by right the chief of the whole creation." . . . . "The very birth of a Brahmin is a constant incarnation of Dherma, God of Justice, for the Brahmin is born to promote justice, and to procure ultimate happiness."

2. *The Priesthood have a right to all property.*

"Whatever exists in the universe is all in effect, though

not in form, the wealth of the Brahmin, since the Brahmin is entitled to it all by his primogeniture and eminence in birth." . . . "The Brahmin eats but his own food, wears but his own apparel, and bestows but his own alms. Through the benevolence of the Brahmin, indeed, other mortals enjoy life." . . . "Let every man according to his ability give wealth to Brahmins detached from the world and learned in scripture. Such as give shall attain heaven after this life."

3. *The Civil Power must consult the Priesthood, and go by its advice.*

"A king desirous of inspecting judicial proceedings, must enter his court of justice composed and sedate in his manner, together with Brahmins and councillors, who know how to give him advice." . . . "Let the king decide cases justly, observing primæval law (of which the Brahmins are the true depositories). But when he cannot inspect such affairs in person, let him appoint for the inspection of them a Brahmin of eminent learning."

4. *The slightest offences against the Priesthood to be most severely punished.*

"If he (an once born man) mention (the twice born men or Brahmins) name and classes with contumely, as if he say Oh Devadatta, Thou refuse of Brahmins, an iron stile, ten fingers long, shall be thrust red-hot into his mouth. Should he, through pride, give instructions to the priests concerning their duty, let the king order some hot oil to be dropped into his mouth and ears." . . It is remarkable, however, that when the offender is one of their own order, the punishments they annex are wholly of a spiritual nature, thus, "A twice born man who barely assaults a Brahmin with intention to hurt him, will be whirled about for a century in the hell

named Tamisra." . . . . "But having smitten him in anger and by design, even with a blade of grass, he shall be born in one and twenty transmigrations from the wombs of impure quadrupeds."

5. *The crimes of the priesthood must be gently dealt with, and capital punishments must never be thought of.*

"No greater crime is known on earth than slaying a Brahmin, and the king, therefore, must not even form in his mind an idea of killing a priest. . . . . Never shall the king slay a Brahmin, though convicted of all possible crimes. Let him banish the offender from his realm, but with all his property secure and his body unhurt. . . Ignominious torture is ordained instead of capital punishment for an adulterer of the priestly class, where the punishment of the other classes may amount to the loss of life."

6. *The priesthood only dare perform the rites of religion, and they form the sole depositaries and expounders of the sacred books.*

"To Brahmins he (Menu) assigned the duties of reading the Veda, of teaching it, of sacrificing and assisting others to sacrifice, of giving alms if they be rich, and, if indigent, of receiving gifts." . . . "To declare the sacerdotal duties, and those of the other classes in due order, the sage Menu sprung from the self-existent, promulgated this code of law, a code which must be studied with extreme care by every learned Brahmin, and fully explained to his disciples, but must be taught to no man of an inferior class." . . . "He who shall acquire knowledge of the Veda without the assent of his preceptor, incurs the guilt of stealing the scripture, and shall sink to the regions of torment. . . . Surely he who

declares the law to a servile man, and he who instructs him in the mode of expiating sin, except by the intervention of a priest, sinks with that very man into the hell called Asamvrita."

7. *The priesthood maintains the existence of a tradition of equal authority with the written word.*

"By Scruti, or what was heard from above, is meant the Veda; and by Smriti, or what was remembered from the beginning, the body of law. Those two must not be oppugned by heterodox arguments, since from those two proceed the whole system of duties."

8. *Those who believe and obey both shall attain heaven.*

"No doubt that man who shall follow the rules prescribed in the Scruti and in the Smriti, will acquire fame in this life, and in the next inexpressible happiness."

9. *Those who read heretical books, and deny the equal authority of tradition and of the written word, are to be viewed as atheists, and to be excommunicated.*

"Whatever man of the three highest classes, having addicted himself to heretical books, shall treat with contempt these two roots of law (the Scruti and the Smriti), must be driven, as an atheist and a scorner of revelation, from the company of the virtuous."

10. *There ought to be Mendicants, Eremites, Flagellants, and other self-tormentors, in the priesthood.*

"Each day let a Brahmin student receive his food by begging with due care from the houses of persons renowned for discharging their duties, and not deficient in performing the sacrifices which the Vedas ordain." . . .

"Having thus remained in the order of a housekeeper

as the law ordains, let the twice-born man, who had before completed his studentship, dwell in a forest, his faith being firm, and his organs wholly subdued."

"Let him (one order of them) wear a black antelope's hide or a vesture of bark; let him bathe evening and morning; let him suffer the hair of his head, his beard and his nails, to grow continually." . . . "His (another order of them) hair, nails, and beard being clipt, bearing with him a dish, a staff, and a waterpot, his whole mind being fixed on God, let him wander about continually, without giving pain to animal or vegetable beings." . . . "In the hot season, let him sit exposed to five fires blazing around him, and the sun above him; in the rains, let him stand uncovered, without even a mantle, where the clouds pour the heaviest showers; in the cold season let him wear a humid vesture, and let him increase by degrees the austerity of his devotion."

These extracts will serve to give a sufficient idea of a Brahmin and of the Brahminical system, which may, as I have shewn, be taken as the most fully developed type of what a self-constituted and unresisted priesthood tends to, where reformation is prevented, and time allowed for the full development of the system, and the complete subjugation of all the other orders of society.

But to give a just idea of the narrow and straitly-bound superstitions which these priests have imposed upon the people,—to tell how they have split the people down into mutually jealous castes, in order that the popular power might be spent upon itself, and thus their own supremacy easily maintained,—to shew how helpless they have made the people, and how completely they have vested in themselves all religious duties, in order that the people may be under the necessity of consulting them on every occasion,—to shew how complete-

ly they have made the whole of piety to lie in the exact observance of ordinances of their own invention, which, of course, they pass off upon the people as the ordinances of God,—to shew how they have placed the whole of duty in obedience to their own authority, suppressing reason and conscience to the utmost in their power,—to enumerate the various articles of diet (exclusively vegetable) to which the higher castes are restricted—the purifications enjoined for the living and the dead—the complicated and fantastical penances and expiations required—the virtue attached to the observance of the five sacraments—the purgatories and transmigrations invented for souls not fully purified at death—the image-worship and the complicated system of idolatry, and the oblations to departed saints and angels or demons,—all which, mainly for the purpose of aggrandizing their own order, they have built upon the sublime religion of the patriarchs, and in which they have long since involved the millions of India,—this would require volumes.

Such has been the state of things in the East, from the earliest antiquity to which we can ascend, down to the present day. The priesthood, instead of continuing the ministers of a pure patriarchal religion, soon assumed a spiritual despotism; soon practised upon the degenerate tendencies of the multitude, and made primæval revelation of none effect through their traditions; soon directed the minds of the devout, or at least suffered them to attach to created forms and figments of fancy, instead of the Almighty, the only living and true God.

Yet, bad as Brahmins are, who will venture to say that things had not been worse without them? When we condemn any one class of men, let us not forget that the sentence of a just God is out against the whole race.

THE PATRIARCH.

Now from this state of things, or rather a state of things tending rapidly to this, from Ur of the Chaldees, which, though we know not exactly where it was (nor even whether it was a place or a state of religious society), yet certainly lay far in the east, God calls Abraham and his family towards the west, takes him under the peculiar care of his providence and grace, imparts to him direct intimation of his will, and, in a word, rescues and restores, in his person and family, the true religion. And from this newly opened fountain of the will of God, which still continues to flow down to us in the page of Inspiration, what do we learn as to the catholicity of true religion? Do we find a large place given to the complicated system then reigning in the East? Do we find a positive precept given to regulate every proceeding, and straitly binding rules, to which all must conform on the pain of excommunication? Quite the reverse. Though Abraham's name be so similar to that of the Indian priesthood (a coincidence which has been made an argument for connecting the Patriarch with the Brahmins), yet how different in every feature is his spirit from theirs! How different the religion in which God builds him up, from that in which that priesthood has built itself up! In the religion of Abraham all is true piety, true liberty. To him either the direct voice of God, or else reason and conscience, which are but the echoes of that voice in the inner man, are every thing. Except in the matter of sacrifices, which, as has been shewn, reason and conscience cannot regulate, Abraham is everywhere left to the guidance of these principles. He is the head of his family, and as such both a priest and a prince, and performs every office, both civil and

sacerdotal. The faith and the spirit of enlightened piety which he enjoyed, were his unfailing guides. Though he was the greatest moral and religious hero that ever existed, yet he was a most considerate and sober-minded man. Even his faith was but a nobler sort of reason. It was indeed wholly a divine gift, and it was purely faith. But it was not a faith that was alone. It was a faith that brought forth fruit, by the use and influence of reasonable considerations. Unlike the fanatical impulses of turgid imaginations, which will not fraternize with reason at all, Abraham's great deeds were all conducted by reason. His faith gave him first principles and energy of character. His reason gave him conduct. And thus, by their mutual and fraternal aid and guidance, Abraham always acted with admirable composure and always displayed a singularly happy combination of firmness and of tenderness.

Thus, in reference to the offering up of Isaac, faith here gave him three great principles, without which he could not have gone one step (so that it may well be said, that "by faith Abraham offered up Isaac"). But his faith was not alone. His actual conduct was regulated by three arguments of reason, grounded on these three principles which faith inspired. Of these principles, the first was, that all God's commandments must be obeyed; and to this, reason added, God has commanded me to sacrifice Isaac, therefore I must do it. The second was, that all God's promises must be fulfilled; and to this, his reason added, that, since God has promised that my race shall be gloriously continued through Isaac childless as yet, my son will be somehow preserved though I sacrifice him. The third was, that God is omnipotent; and to this, reason added, Omnipotence can raise the dead,—I account that God is able to raise Isaac from the dead.* Thus did

* Heb. xi. 17.

faith and reason beautifully fraternize in the mind of the Friend of God. And thus, while we derive from the patriarchal age one of the finest examples of moral magnanimity which history records, we learn also the means by which such magnanimity is to be attained.*

Here, also, we have a fine illustration of the power of true faith to extend and exalt the intellect. When Abraham compared the former promises of his God, whom he knew to be altogether faithful, with His present command to offer Isaac in sacrifice,—to what did this seeming incompatibility lead him? It awoke in him, as has just been stated, the idea of the resurrection, a doctrine which was not fully revealed till many ages after. And thus Abraham's faith, animating his reason, enabled him to anticipate, in this great discovery, all his contemporaries by many generations. And so it is with faith generally, when faith is genuine, and truly linked in brotherhood with reason. It makes the spirit far-seeing and strong. It ennobles man in every feature.

But these subjects, however interesting in themselves, are too remotely connected with our inquiry to render it warrantable to pursue them farther. Let us, therefore, proceed to notice that event in Abraham's life in which he displays the catholicity of true religion in a manner no less magnanimous than he shewed his faith, when he offered up Isaac.

ABRAHAM AND MELCHISEDEC.

Though Abraham was the called of God, he was not the only person in those parts who, like himself, was a patriarch, and enjoyed and administered the true religion. The Prince or King of Salem was another, in no respect Abraham's inferior, and in some respects greatly above

* James ii. 22.

him. Melchisedec was the priest of the Most High God. Nor was this all. He was the type of the Messiah, of whom Abraham was only the remote progenitor. And it is truly delightful, and a fine example of the catholicity of true religion, to observe the manner in which these great and good men proceed, when the providence of God brings them together. There are, indeed, some things respecting Melchisedec "which are hard to be explained;"* but whoever he was, it makes no difference in the lesson which his meeting with Abraham is calculated to teach us. And what is that lesson? Plainly this; that when, by the events of Providence, two pious men, both of whose hearts are right with God, are brought together, they ought to recognise each other as brethren, and each treating with respect the creed and ritual of the other, both ought to enter upon that friendly and sacred communion which is meet for the sons of God.

But what are the facts of this case? When Melchisedec meets Abraham, does he begin their intercourse by religious precognitions as to denominations, as to what points they were agreed on, and what points they differed on? Does he consider an uniformity in all points between himself and "the righteous man who came from the East,"† as essential to their religious communion, and the first point to be ascertained? Or does he, in the quality of superior and priest, proceed to impose his own ritual upon Abraham? No: nothing like this. And how different from what we are accustomed to now! Melchisedec, we are informed, brought out with him, when he himself came to meet Abraham, and before he had seen the Patriarch at all, the symbols of bread and wine, and, as soon as he met him, he presented them to him and blessed him. And forthwith the two men of God enjoyed a full religious communion together, their great hearts overflowing

* Heb. v. 11. † Isaiah xli. 29.

with the love of God and of each other. Nor was all the openness of heart on the side of the King of Salem. Abraham in return, and without inquiring whether he who assumed these most exalted functions of the priesthood had the genealogy of the sacerdotal order (which we know he had not*), but, perceiving his moral greatness and superiority to himself in his presence and words, accepts his benediction, and in return presents him with a tithe of all his spoils.

Such was the meeting of Abraham and Melchisedec. Nothing finer ever occurred in the subsequent history of the church. The patriarchal state, indeed, admits of all that is finest in religion and humanity. And when the Spirit of Inspiration led David to say, "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than the dwellings of Jacob," it was chiefly in respect of the fact, that from Zion should proceed the salvation that should be catholic, as may be seen from the psalm where these words occur.† But in the incident which has just been noticed, we have a fine example of the catholic spirit which the patriarchal state also tends to cherish. And this instance occurring in the church in that early epoch, and handed down to us, is of the greatest value to us; not only for its own sake, as happening in the true church; but from the generally admitted fact, that Christianity is more nearly related to the patriarchal religion, and is more truly a return to it and development of it, than of the peculiar economy which intervened between the patriarchal age and the birth of Christ.

But except in the East, humanity, as has been already stated, is never stationary. Accordingly, after a time, the patriarchal constitution begins to change and to decay, even in the elect family. The race of Ham,‡ originally defective in family feeling, as the sacred narra-

* Heb. vii. 6. † Ps. lxxxvii. 2. ‡ Gen. ix. 22.

tive acquaints us, had long since, like that of Cain, similarly defective,* passed from the patriarchal or family constitution to that of the city under the heroic and lawless spirit of Nimrod,† or possibly under the pressure of the wild beasts which Nimrod's heroic spirit was engaged in extirpating. Thus, of Abraham's life, all the details are truly patriarchal and pastoral. When guests arrive, he runs to the flock, chooses a calf, and dresses it for them ;‡ and though wine was well known in the land in those days, he presents to them milk only. Isaac, his son, however, less a stranger than his father to the habits of the effeminate Canaanites among whom he dwelt, makes use of wine ; and a kid from the flock is no longer dainty enough for him. He must have venison.§ Nor is he content with being rich in flocks, he purchases land for agriculture from the king of Gerar.‖ In a word, the constitution of the family is changing even in the days of Isaac ; and now, in the days of Jacob, the time is come when the family of Abraham must part with the patriarchal constitution altogether, and, according to a proceeding very usual in the course of Providence, must, by submitting to evil itself, become a blessing to the whole world.

THE EGYPTIANS.

There is a famine in the land where the posterity of Abraham sojourn, Jacob his grandson being patriarch ; and how is the elect family to be preserved? They go down into Egypt. And here they find an asylum already provided for them ; nay, we may say, honourably purchased. For Joseph, one of themselves, was there before them, and, divinely assisted, had availed himself of the

* Gen. iv. 8. † Gen. ix. 8. ‡ Gen. xviii.
§ Gen. xxvii. ‖ Gen. xxvi. 12.

general famine to consolidate and unite the whole kingdom of Egypt, previously consisting of many conflicting independencies, into one great nation. To him, therefore, Pharaoh was deeply indebted for the new stability he had imparted to the monarchy. Nor was Pharaoh his only debtor. The whole nation owed him much for their better prospects of peace for the future, as well as for corn during the famine in the mean time. Joseph's brethren then were welcome into the land of Egypt, in as far at least as an immediate reception is considered.

But what sort of people were the Egyptians among whom the chosen people were thus to be immersed for a season, if not for ever? This is an interesting question, and though of late years the subject has begun to be attended to in such a manner as would enable us to answer it satisfactorily, it is enough to mention here that more could be said in favour of the Egyptians than of any other nation of that epoch. We are ourselves deeply indebted to ancient Egypt. In fact to her Greece owed almost every thing at first, and Rome to Greece, and we to Rome. Egypt therefore has claims on us. Nor this in the aspect of profane history only; or in reference to the transmission of the arts and sciences merely. Egypt was the scene of God's wonders, and next to God himself, Egypt had the making of Moses. And bad as that country was in a religious point of view during the sojourn of the Israelites, it appears that all the surrounding nations were far worse. Thus while the Mosaic law inculcates that others must be shunned and even exterminated in order that the true religion might live, it forbids the Israelites to hate the Egyptians. And while it enjoins that the descendants of the surrounding nations shall not be admitted into the congregation of the Lord till the tenth or twelfth generation, some of them never, it admits the Egyptian in the third. The martyr Ste-

phen, in like manner, when demonstrating that it said nothing against the true greatness of Jesus Christ, that he was rejected by his contemporaries and his countrymen, since Moses himself, in whom they boasted, was almost as barbarously treated by their fathers in his lifetime, mentions it as a most eminent feature in the greatness of Moses, that he was educated at the court of Pharaoh, and was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, a statement with which he immediately connects the fact of Moses being mighty in words and in deeds.* Let us not, therefore, think too meanly of the Egyptians —let us not fancy that the descent of the Israelites into Egypt was a mere accident. It was designed by God to serve great purposes.

But whatever may be said in favour of Egypt, there, too, as in every populous country all over the East, the purity of religion was lost. The land was overrun with a priesthood, if not in every respect the same, yet in spirit the same as that from which Abraham was called. And the whole of the popular religion at least, as is usual in such a case, had degenerated in their hands into unedifying ceremonial. We must not, indeed, form our opinion of the religion of the ancient Egyptians from the Roman satirist, who ridicules their onion-worship; or from our own superficial conceptions. As commonly represented, the rites and ceremonies, and even the objects of worship of the ancient Egyptians, seem absurd and even ridiculous; but when viewed in a certain light, which, however, we have lost, they seem, on the contrary, to have been so engaging that even Joseph speaks of the cup whereby he divined, as if he too had been carried away by the mystic divinations and allurements of priestcraft.

* Acts vii. 22.

THE ISRAELITES.

But if even Joseph himself, so pure and so heavenly-minded, and who had learned in his youth the true patriarchal religion of his father's house—if even Joseph had already felt the mystic charm of the rites and ceremonies which the sacerdotal art everywhere invents to advance its own ascendancy, what will have become of the Israelites when they shall have been domesticated in Egypt for generations, when their fathers, who brought the true religion with them from Syria, shall have been dead and forgotten; especially when we consider that, as might be expected, they are now slaves of the powerful Egyptians, and must of course be kept in a state of ignorance as complete as possible, which the Egyptians were too politic not to know to be the state most favourable to subjection? If the Egyptians really were the learned, powerful, and politic people, which there is every reason to believe they were, are we not to expect that they shall have damped, in every conceivable way, the minds of the Israelites until they have quenched all true knowledge and every noble sentiment? And, more especially, since the religion of the true God must doubtless have been an object of terror to them, as every thing is which is not understood; are we not to expect that the priesthood shall have practised upon the successive generations of Israelitish children till they have replaced the truth of God with their own superstitions, and brought the Israelites both soul and body into bondage? To do this were doubtless very bad on the part of the Egyptians. Still it is only what all people in the like circumstances would have attempted. And if the Egyptians succeeded while others have failed, it was only because they were more equal to their attempts than others, not because they were more wicked.

GOD'S CHOICE.

But let the Israelites be now immersed in all the degradation which hereditary slavery entails, and in all the lowest superstitions which an Egyptian priest can teach,—let them be naturally a rebellious and stiff-necked race,—these are no difficulties to God,—no obstacles in the way of his purposes regarding his people. Nay, their moral weakness and degradation, instead of forming a reason why God should decline them or cast them off, forms rather a reason why He should select them as a race, and choose them at that very moment, both to preserve the true religion, when all other nations had lost it, and to give birth to the Redeemer of all mankind. God is not like man, under the necessity of choosing the best and most competent to effectuate His plans. He can make any one do all His will. Were He, indeed, to choose the best and most competent, it would always leave it a question, how much of what was achieved was to be ascribed to God,—how much to man. And in this case, as men's prepossessions are naturally in their own favour, but little would generally be ascribed to God; and thus the truth of the matter would be obscured, a sense of God would be lost, and consequently all true piety along with it. Therefore, in the forcible language of St Paul, "God chooses the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the things that are mighty, and base things of the world, and things that are despised, doth God choose; yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence." *

Nor was it only in the choice of the Israelites that this great principle was illustrated. It was remarkably illus-

* 1 Cor. i. 27.

trated in all that relates to the Redeemer himself. Though truly the Son of God, a woman was chosen to be his mother; and that not a princess, but a virgin in humble life, betrothed to a carpenter. And as to his death, not a bed of state, or the glorious hour of victory was his. He died the death reserved for felon-slaves. He was crucified. And so, in all that was His between his birth and his death, God chose the things which were most despised among men for his walk. Need we wonder, then, if, in the former dispensation, the Jews were chosen as God's peculiar people? Was their present degeneracy, now that they were so reduced in all but number under Egyptian policy, a reason why God should fail to fulfil the promise made to their magnanimous progenitor? Nay, rather let them be beloved for their father's sake. Nothing is difficult to God. The necessities of the case do, indeed, always give the form to His manner of proceeding. But never can the case of man become so desperate, as to prevent God from doing all His will.

It is altogether wonderful what He has done by the Jews already; and yet it is not unwarrantable to believe that by them He will do greater wonders still. Surely it is well that Christians are now bending their sympathies, in good earnest, to the forlorn Israelites. How many prophesies, full of the promise of their glory, still remain unfulfilled! How high the privilege to help their fulfilment forward!

Meantime, let us return to the land of Egypt.

THE NECESSITY.

The Israelites must no longer be bondsmen. Jehovah is a God who breaketh the bands of the yoke of His

people, and MAKETH THEM TO WALK UPRIGHT.* The chosen race must be rescued, and carried out of Egypt. And to secure their perpetuity as a nation, till the time arrive when the Messiah may be born, they must be built up into a nation apart, and in a manner, be hid from all other nations, except those whom they shall be able to subdue.† With their rescue the true religion must also be restored to them, and by its side a heroic spirit must be awoke in their breasts; which, in the first instance, must take its outgoings, in devoting the enemies of that religion to destruction; and afterwards, when the Messiah is come, must be transformed into a spirit of self-devotion to the service of God and the love of man.

But since their rescue is a measure of necessity, and since the true religion admits of a form suited to every state of the human soul, from the most abject to the noblest, are we not to expect some new dispensation, suited to the peculiar circumstances of the afflicted and degraded population whom it is designed to encourage, to regulate, and to save? The patriarchal religion, adapted to the contemplative lives of the fathers of individualized rural families,—a religion all simplicity, all spirituality, all consisting in the exercise of reflection, and in the spontaneous devotion of the heart, would, plainly, never do for a mass of human creatures just emancipated from a state of slavery under idolatrous masters, who had lorded it over them for many generations.

That the Israelites actually were in a most degraded state in religion, not less than in natural spirit, Scripture,‡

* Lev. xxxii. 13.

† This is, indeed, language in which Josephus, their great historian, describes them.

‡ Josh. xxiv. 14. Ezek. xx. 7.

as well as their whole history in the wilderness, assures us. They were living in idolatry, and they had lost the natural courage of men. Plainly, they could not have been affected in any degree of a religion so simple and so spiritual as that of the patriarchs. Nay, so difficult was it to impress them with any right notion of the true God, that not all the miracles which Moses wrought in their interest in Egypt,—not their miraculous Exodus,—nothing short of the destruction of Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea, could bring them to believe and confess that Jehovah was God. In a word, reason and conscience with them were good for little or nothing. And little or nothing, in the meantime, at least, could be entrusted to these principles. What, then, was to be done? Plainly, it is to be expected that their want of wisdom to devise, and of principle to adhere to what is right, will be divinely supplied by a code of positive institutes; and because, when judgment upon evil works is not executed speedily, the heart is apt to continue to be set upon doing evil, it is also to be expected that, in the forthcoming code of laws, rewards and punishments as immediate as possible, will be annexed. It is to be expected, also, that their incapacity for a simple and spiritual worship will be met, by the spiritualities of religion, being clothed in a material and visible symbolism, which may engage the heart through the delights of the eye, and the pleasures of the imagination. But such a form of religion necessarily demands an ample, and a regularly constituted and united priesthood, to administer it.

These three things, therefore, do the circumstances of the Israelites, when about to be rescued from Egypt, lead us to expect in a religion that will be suited to them; and these three things, therefore, do the wisdom and goodness of God lead us to expect, in the Mosaic

dispensation, *first*, An ample code of positive institutions and precepts; *secondly*, A ritual composed, in a great measure, of a significant, but palpable and beautiful symbolism; and, *thirdly*, A regularly constituted priesthood, which may administer those laws and that ritual, and teach the people religion. Such is the form of the Mosaic dispensation, which reason, contemplating the character of God, and the circumstances of the case, leads us to expect.

And what was the Mosaic dispensation in point of fact? The reader has only to study the books of Moses, in order to see realized all that enlightened reason leads him to expect regarding it.

MOSES.

And, here, how pleasing would it be to transport the reader to the banks of the Nile, where the infant Moses is lying among the bulrushes, cradled in the little ark in which his heaven-directed mother laid him,—his sister, mean time, watching over him in the distance; while Pharaoh's daughter comes to the place to bathe, and discovers the beautiful child. There is nothing finer, nor so fine, as the history of Moses, in the whole world of fiction. But, in this place, it must suffice to say, that Moses, brought up as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, instructed in the sacerdotal religion, and all the wisdom of Egypt on the one hand, and in the patriarchal religion, by Jethro, on the other, is called and inspired for the mighty achievement of framing a Theocracy for the Israelites.

And, inspecting the institutions which Moses was inspired to make, we find that they correspond exactly with those which piety and reason anticipate. There we

find a code of laws and positive institutions, so ample and so excellent, that well might Moses say of it as he does.* "It is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldst say, Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear and do it? (which is all that philosophy could ever say as yet). Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldst say, Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart, that thou mayst do it." The children of Israel were not called upon to discover or develope a ritual for themselves. They were not capable of that. All was arranged,—all was done for them. They had only to hear and obey. And, looking unto the institutions and ritual that were prepared for them, we find there a system of holy and pure religion embodied in a visible symbolism, at once most beautiful and significant; and which, though it was but materialism after all,† yet never concealed, but rather gave a form to the spiritual truths which it was designed to prefigure and to typify. It was also signally distinguished from all other religions then extant, in that it admitted neither images, nor hieroglyphics, nor mysteries, nor divination, in any form; in a word, none of the devices of priestcraft. Volumes would not be sufficient to tell how much there is to admire in this dispensation, or to point out all the features in which it contrasts itself beautifully with those degenerate systems which co-existed along with it, whether in India, Chaldea, Canaan, or Egypt.

But though the Mosaic institutes admitted of none of the arts of priestcraft, its most conspicuous and its most admirable feature is, its regularly ordained priesthood. And this is a subject which calls for a few remarks some-

* Deut. xxx. 11. † Heb. ix. 10.

what more in detail. It has been already affirmed as a general truth, and in reference to India it has been shewn, that a priesthood ever tends to assume the supremacy, which, though sometimes very useful, even when self-assumed, is yet, generally, to be condemned as unfavourable to spirituality of religion, and all true liberty both sacred and civil. Let us mark, then, how beautifully the advantages to be derived from a priesthood are secured, and the evils prevented, in the Jewish Theocracy. And this may be easily told. In a word, the Mosaic priesthood, while it is appointed, is also chartered. The law for the priests is laid down with as much exactness as the law for the people.*

And, in reference to the position assigned to the sacerdotal order in the community, we have to remark also, that not only were the laws for it fully and explicitly laid down, but that the priesthood was not the class which was nearest to God, and communicated most immediately with him. Neither was the lawgiver himself a priest. There was an order possessing a higher authority than the priesthood, and Moses was one of that order. He was a prophet. And, with casual intermissions, this superior order was divinely maintained all along; and its calling was to regulate and reprove the priesthood, as well as every other class of the community. Nor was this higher function of the prophets unsupported by ceremonies designed to teach it. Thus, to shew, in reference to the priesthood, that they could not be self-constituted, and were not free to pretend to immediate communica-

* It is, indeed, delightful to see, that, when all around was but the exercise of arbitrary power, most frequently carried on by lawless tyranny, or exterminating wars and rebellions, the principle of a charter between the government and the governed was well understood, and acted upon among the people of God. Thus, Samuel would not anoint Saul king, till the charter between him and his subjects was first settled by both parties.

tions with God, and so to raise themselves above all law, as every where in the East, the heathen priesthoods have done, the priests among the Jews had their ears, fingers, and toes, touched by the blood of the sacrifice at their consecration, as much as to say, that they must listen to the law given them, and be active in obeying it.

Nor was it only during the days of Moses, that the priesthood was thus regulated. The same constitution was intended to be continued during all the subsequent history of the Jews, till the advent of the Messiah himself. Prophets were raised up, from time to time, whose calling was higher than that even of the high priest himself. And though they neither belonged to the sacerdotal class, nor had received an education in the temple, on them the Spirit of God rested. Thus they were clearly demonstrated to be nearer to Jehovah than the priesthood; and thus they taught the people with a more authoritative voice, and from a higher vantage ground.

But while the priesthood were thus prevented from the exercise of those exclusive pretensions in the administration of religious instruction which the sacerdotal order is every where too prone to affect, so were the prophets prevented from supposing, that to them alone were divine communications made; and thus were they, too, kept from that despotism which the possession of exclusive privileges is so apt to engender every where. Nor on the prophets only did the Spirit rest. He sometimes endowed inferior orders with miraculous gifts. Thus, when the congregation lusted after flesh in the wilderness, the Spirit rested on the seventy elders, so that not only those who had assembled in the court of the tabernacle prophesied, but even two who had remained in the camp.* This was, indeed, a state of things which appeared to Joshua, so disorderly, that he entreat-

* Numb. xi. 26. See also 1 Sam. xix. 20.

ed Moses to forbid them. But what was the answer of the great prophet? "Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake. I would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them." An answer in which we cannot fail to observe a resemblance to that which our Saviour gave, in similar circumstances, to James and John.* And both of which unite in teaching us, that though exclusiveness in religion be frequently, as in the case of Joshua, James, and John, the error of great and good men, yet it is not the spirit either of Moses or of Christ.

THE JUDGES.

But, besides the Prophets, the people of God were favoured with another institution, calculated in a remarkable manner to prevent all usurpation and all undue influence and authority on the part of the priesthood. After the death of Moses, God gave the Israelites a succession of heroes, under the name of Judges. And these Judges being at once devoted to the honour of Jehovah, and animated by the heroic spirit (which, since persuasion was out of the question, was the only engine that could subdue the abominable idolatry of the priests and worshippers of Baal, which then filled the land of promise), served admirably to attract and engage the hearts of the people, and to sustain them above that superstitious tendency which had already made all the surrounding nations an easy prey to their designing priests. The surrounding nations had nothing but their priesthoods to look to, for guidance in every thing; and they, of course, always acted as men of the world do, that is, chiefly for their own aggrandizement. But for their aggrandizement, nothing could

* Luke ix. 50.

be so favourable as to leave the masses, whose unconditional submission they sought, to plunge as deeply as possible in ignorance, superstition, and voluptuous indulgence; for these things, especially the last, render a people weak and effeminate, and easily governed by authority, however arbitrary. And these base tendencies the surrounding priesthoods did not scruple to encourage. And they succeeded. And hence the wickedness and abominations of the Canaanitish nations, on account of which they were driven out.* But such a policy in the Levitical priesthood, though that order had had a mind for it, and such moral abandonment and effeminacy in the masses, were prevented in the case of the Israelites by the existence of the Judges. The calling of these chiefs was to awake and sustain the heroic spirit. But this spirit is, of all possible frames of mind, the most opposed to superstition and effeminacy; and hence its value, in certain circumstances, as, for instance, in the times when it was divinely awoke. For, while the surrounding nations by their criminal indulgences in the impure worship of Astoroth, had become weak and pusillanimous to the last degree (and if easy to be governed by their own idolatrous priests, who served out these indulgences to them, also easy to be subdued by the Israelites, though they were but a handful in comparison), the people of God continued comparatively pure and magnanimous.

The Judges, also, by the infallible tokens of a divine commission, which they could shew to the priesthood, as the warrant for their heroic designs and achievements, tended many ways to sustain the character of the sacerdotal order; especially by giving it, to feel the necessity of maintaining the spiritual power in a state of as great efficiency as possible, to match the temporal, which was thus careering above their enemies, and near to God.

* Deut. ix. 4.

In a word, each estate in the realm was calculated to sustain another. And thus, as an eagle stirreth up her nest, and hovereth over her young, and spreadeth her wings, taketh them up and beareth them on her pinions, God sustained his people and led them, until he planted them securely in the land of promise. And here let us remark, in passing, that in this promise there was not a blessing to the posterity of Abraham according to the flesh only, as is commonly thought. There was a higher blessing to his posterity according to the faith; for Syria, the land of promise, is as it were the centre of the whole world, the keystone which unites Europe with Asia, the telegraph station between the East and the West, the region above all others desirable for the true light to shine from, for the sun of righteousness to arise in, and thence to spread those beams which were to enlighten the Gentiles all round, and be a salvation to the ends of the earth.*

THE LEVITES.

But a succession of prophets, standing aloof from the priesthood, and teaching the will of God from a higher eminence, and a greater nearness to God than the priests, and a succession of judges, executing the will of God by heroic deeds, and thus securing the admiration of the people, and attaching them to them, were not the only provisions made during the theocracy, for the security of true liberty to the people, and the prevention of a spiritual despotism on the part of the priesthood. Another institution, calculated to produce the same results, was the parting of the sacerdotal class into two orders, viz. priests and levites. Had the whole tribe been priests, their power would have been much greater; and supremacy much

* Is. xlix. 6.

more easily attainable. But the Levites prevented the undue ascendency of the priests. They formed a middle term, a link between the priesthood and the people, their functions continually bringing them into contact with both. And thus they effectually prevented the priesthood from insulating itself from the mass of the people, and from forming a caste; as a priesthood is too apt to do, and has done every where else in the East. In consequence of this arrangement, we do indeed sometimes find no small degree of confusion among the different orders of the state; and more especially, on several critical occasions, we find the priesthood gaining the supremacy; as the spiritual power naturally tends to do, of course, when there is not equal spiritual power on the part of the people. But this was not to be regretted on the occasions on which it occurred. The nation never had chiefs to whom it owed more in the junctures when they lived, than Samuel, and the Asmonean Princes, though both equally were of the tribe of Levi. But such a state of things never continued long, nor had a happy issue. And, to balance it on the other hand, princes who did not belong to the sacerdotal order at all, did sometimes perform functions and actions proper to the priesthood only. Even David, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him, entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests.*

These events in the history of the Mosaic economy are apt to appear of but little value to us now. But the state of the case is far otherwise when they are viewed in the light of collateral events, and considered by the philosophy of history. In this point of view they are most important. Nothing of the kind that has been men-

* Matt. xii. 3.

tioned, had ever happened in the world before. All around and every where else, the slightest interference with the functions of the priesthood, or with their supremacy, was deemed the greatest of crimes, and was punished as such. The details which have been noticed then in the constitution and history of the chosen people, are most instructive as to the place which God designs that a priesthood should occupy in such a state of society, and of the human mind, as prevailed during the theocracy. They shew, that even where a priesthood, as influential as is at all compatible with the interests of true religion, is most desirable, and where, in fact, it exists by the appointment of God himself, still there must be another authority, which shall not be amenable to the priesthood for its proceedings, which, however just in their cause, and happy in their issue, the sacerdotal order might be disposed to visit too severely, as infringements on their exclusive privileges.

In conclusion, we see in the Levitical priesthood, one of the finest displays of divine wisdom which the history of man presents, at once for investing with high authority, an order of men unquestionably of the greatest value to the well-being of every community; but yet, for so limiting that authority, that, not without open disobedience to God, and a violation of the constitution of the state, as well as at great personal risk, could the priesthood rise into that irresponsible supremacy, which heathen priesthoods have almost every where succeeded in attaining, and which the priesthood of the Church of Rome had all but accomplished, when it was ruined by its own arrogance, which the heroic spirit of the feudal nations could not brook.

And now it would be a not ungrateful task to follow the Israelites in their many wanderings, and to mark the wisdom as well as the goodness of Jehovah, in all that

He called them to be, to do, and to suffer. But such details are only remotely connected with the object of this work. No inconsiderable step has been made, however, if it appear from what has been shewn, that, even during the theocracy, the priesthood was chartered and limited, and had no exclusive right, either to dictate arbitrarily to the people on the subject of religion, or to make positive institutes of their own. Many institutions were made, however; and let it be granted that the spirit of these institutions implied an uniformity over all, in the practice of religion. It was, indeed, in point of fact, more generally otherwise. But this need not be insisted in. Let an universal uniformity, in reference to the Mosaic dispensation, be granted. It will afterwards appear whether this makes for or against the views of this work. Here we must pass on.

JETHRO.

Let us, however, notice one event which happened almost at the beginning of the wanderings of the Israelites, which bears directly upon the question, whether, in order to a true communion of pious men, there must be an uniformity over all, or whether an unity in the spirit of true religion, though there be variety in external forms, be not enough. I allude to the meeting of Moses and Jethro in the wilderness. And what does this meeting prove? Does it not shew most clearly that all peculiar as the Mosaic dispensation was, yet, when rightly understood, it admitted fully of the catholicity of true religion? For what were the circumstances of the case? Jethro was a patriarch residing over his family and dependents in a part of Arabia, not far distant from that which the Israelites were to pass through. In our public version of the Bible he is called the priest of Midian, but it

is well known that the Hebrew word here rendered priest signifies also prince, and that Jethro might equally well have been called the prince of Median. He was, in fact, both. He was a patriarch; and although in Egypt, on the western side of the Red Sea, humanity had long since left the patriarchal constitution and the purity of the patriarchal religion, yet, in the land of Median, both seem to have existed still. And Jethro was in every point of view worthy of religious communion with the chosen people of God. Well, this he fully enjoyed when they met. Notwithstanding the great differences in religious circumstances of the two parties, nothing could be more congenial than their intercourse. Nor was the interchange of thought and feeling between them of a friendly and secular character only. It was of a religious nature also. In order to be convinced of this, it is only necessary to peruse the passage of Exodus,* where their interview is recorded. It is thus concluded :—" And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took a burnt-offering and sacrifices for God; and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law before God." In other words, the Jewish high priest and the whole representatives of the congregation joined cordially in communion with these stranger but pious Midianites. Not one stood aloof. All united. Such was the meeting of Moses and Jethro. It reminds us of the meeting of Abraham and Melchisedec. Both are most beautiful displays of the catholic spirit of true religion. Both teach most expressly that wherever we find true religion, the fear of God, and personal piety, there we find the just grounds of evangelical intercourse, esteem, and love, however considerable the difference in externals, whether of language, country, or religious forms. Both teach that there may be an ordained priesthood without an exclusive spirit, and that

* Exod. xviii. 12.

ministers of religion of different denominations, and their people along with them, may and ought to preserve the unity of spirit in the bonds of peace, may and ought to meet each other as Christian brethren, each esteeming another better than himself,* each esteeming all upon a footing of equal recognition and honour.

In these cases, however, in the ancient church, and in all similar cases, the grace of God has much to do before such a beautiful result can be obtained. And especially with respect to the sacred order, as its spiritual privileges in general are greater than those of the other classes of the community, so, in this particular matter, are its trials greater. Instead of an open-heartedness to religious communion with all who love the Lord Jesus, the sacerdotal spirit is quite of another stamp; and, therefore, it happens too generally, that instead of being the first, priests and even pastors who differ are the last to agree. Instead "of being examples to their flocks,"† like Abraham, Melchisedec, Moses, and Jethro, they are too often the hinderance and the reproach each of his own congregation or church. And this not so much because each is in all things behind others who see him to be wrong in this particular, or because he is either naturally as a man, or privately as a Christian, of an exclusive spirit; but because he is of the sacerdotal order, and feels the dignity of his calling, and is betrayed by this feeling into a spirit of exclusiveness and despotism, through want of grace proportional. The spirit of James and John in the early days of their ministry, is too apt to be that of their successors all their days. Nothing but the spirit of Christ can keep the zealous from preaching by fire. To rest satisfied simply in turning away from those who will not receive us, and in shaking off the dust of their city from our shoes, and to leave altogether our own justifica-

* Phil. ii. 3. † 1 Peter v. 3.

tion and their condemnation to the judgment, is what our office wholly indisposes us for, and nothing but eminent grace can enable us to do it. And let not these remarks be taken amiss by the clergy, since the author thus does not scruple to identify himself with the order, one of whose tendencies he thus condemns.

THE CONSTITUTION.

The sketch of sacred history, which we are now taking, would be equally available for illustrating the catholicity of good civil government, did that subject lie within our sphere. The doctrine of unity of spirit in variety of form, is every where illustrated in the proceedings of Providence, whether in regulating the economy of nature or the constitution of human society. Of this we have a remarkable instance in the epoch of history which we have now hurriedly glanced at. Thus God gave the Egyptians one constitution through Joseph, the Israelites another through Moses. The God who gave both was one. The spirit of both was one, and yet the form of the one differed widely from that of the other. And, in fact, it was only by instituting such a difference in form, that the unity of spirit and of object in reference to both could be manifested and maintained. For when two people differ from each other in their civilization, manners, moral condition, and moral diseases, then, in order that any proposed result, as, for instance, the best state of moral health, may be attained, the appliances, the medicines, must plainly be different in the two cases. And so it was in reference to Egypt and Israel. In Egypt, before Joseph's day, a multitude of independent chiefs or princes kept the nation always disunited, always in fragments, and, consequently, always weak, exposed, and unhappy.

What was necessary for the strength and stability of the nation, and the happiness of the Egyptian people, was unity and centralization of the government. But in order to this, the power of its many independent tribes and princedoms must be reduced. Accordingly, Joseph, divinely assisted, and with corn as his weapon, reduced all the independences into one great nation, and united all its princes as subjects of Pharaoh. This did Joseph under God for Egypt; and hence, in a great measure, if not altogether, the greatness of that nation above the other nations of antiquity.

God's dealings with the Israelites, on the other hand, were altogether different from this; and that just because their moral condition and their wants were altogether different. Instead of being the spirited vassals of independent princes, whom a famine must humble before they would receive a good and a united government, the Israelites were abject slaves, who would take nothing upon themselves, and who needed to be miraculously fed by food from heaven. Instead of being disposed to take any share in the government, or to consider the difficult times that Moses had to deal with, they merely cried out against their ruler for every evil that befel them. Such was their case. It contrasted in every feature with that of the spirited Egyptians. Instead of being subdued, therefore, the Israelites needed rather to be taught the difficulty of governing, by each man having something given him to do. Their character needed to be developed by the dignity and responsibility which franchise and a voice in the state confer. In a word, they needed to be constituted members of a republic—so ordered, however, that it might not fall into anarchy through the incompetence of the many to administer it. Now this is just the form of government which God instituted through Moses among the chosen people. And thus we see, emanating

from the same divine source, a monarchy in Egypt, a theocratic republic in the wilderness.

These few passing remarks may be taken as a specimen of the light which the sacred history may be made to throw on the most interesting questions which engage, and too often unhappily agitate and distract, the world. The study of the sacred Scriptures, in this point of view, has indeed been but little attended to hitherto, and, therefore, in this sphere of sacred criticism, a wide field is still uncultivated. It is a pleasing feature, however, in all the respectable commentaries which are published in these our days, that they bestow far more pains on such subjects than those of a former age. Not that we mean to flatter ourselves, as if we were more devoted to the illustration of the Bible than our forefathers. The fact is far otherwise. We are not to be praised for doing that which has been commended. It is a matter of necessity with us. Preceding commentators have completely exhausted the illustration of the Scriptures in a devotional point of view. It is a waste of time to attempt any thing better in this respect than they have bequeathed to us. If we are to do any thing at all, therefore, in biblical illustration, it can only be in reference to antiquities, geography, polity, and the philosophy of history. And it is delightful to observe (being a fine example of God's overruling and arranging better for man, than man does for himself, or even discovers when the thing is going on and he reaping the benefit), how beautifully this necessity, which the active-minded believer is now under, coincides with the wants of the times. For what is now chiefly wanted is such an illustration of the Scriptures as may resolve the difficulties which are apt to suggest themselves on an irreligious perusal of them, and so to give colour to infidelity. But the illustrations of the kind alluded to, and of which several examples have been already given in this

work, not only make all difficulties disappear, but shew that the Scriptures are more replete with even literary, historical, and philosophical interest, than any other volume to which the merely intellectual man, or the merely critically disposed, can turn. And commentaries bringing out these points, though they are apt, at first sight, to offend those who are strong in the faith, and whose piety is of long standing, yet will never materially injure them; while, on the other hand, they may be the means of reconciling thousands to the word of God, and thus ultimately of bringing them to the knowledge of the truth. But on these subjects we need not enlarge.

And now let us pass over long ages of sacred history (various in every feature but in this, that they are always instructive), in order to abridge to a proper degree our illustrations of the catholicity of true religion derived from this field of observation.

THE PHARISEE.

We have seen how minutely and strictly the Mosaic institutes defined and limited the functions and privileges of the priesthood. Still, history acquaints us with the fact, that during the latter period of the constitution, aided probably by the fact that the princes of the nation belonged to the sacerdotal order, that order departed in a remarkable manner from the purity of its first institution, and shewed all the worst features of an exclusive, tyrannous, and hypocritical spirit.

Of this spirit, and of the priesthood as an order, the Pharisee was the representative; and we have only to look to his pretensions and tenets to see in the holy land the same bad system which we have already seen, and could bear with more toleration in India and Egypt.

The characteristics of the Pharisees were these,—a desire for popular supremacy, indicated by their love of the uppermost seats in the synagogue, of greetings in the market-place, and of being called Rabbi,—a taste for honouring the dead, and for persecuting the living, indicated by their building the tombs of the prophets, and ornamenting the sepulchres of the righteous, while they persecuted and crucified the living witnesses of the truth,—a claim of immunities for their order, indicated by their binding heavy burdens, and laying them on men's shoulders, while they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers,—a pretension to an oral tradition of equal authority with the written word, and making the law of God of none effect,—the doctrine that man is able to keep both laws, and even to perform works of supererogation,—the necessity for penitents to give satisfaction by fastings, alms, purifications, and sacrifices, confessions, and deprecations of sin,—the doctrine of purgations after death in an intermediate state, —the wearing of a sanctimonious dress,—ostentatious praying in the streets,—rigid discipline, in fastings, watchings, &c.,—a scrupulous care in avoiding all objects of legal impurity; in a word, the placing of the whole of religion in positive institutions and external observances. Add to these the institution of various religious orders, of which the *Truncatus* was one, who, that he might appear in profound meditation, as if destitute of feet, scarcely lifted them from the ground; the *Mortarius* another, who, that his meditations might not be disturbed, wore a deep cap, in the shape of a mortar, which would only permit him to look upon the ground at his feet; and the *Impingens*, a third, who, shutting his eyes as he walked along, to avoid the sight of women, often struck his head against the wall! And under all this shew of zeal and devotion, vanity, avarice, licen-

tiousness, and a spirit of cruel persecution,—such was the Pharisee. We equally remark, in him, the characteristics of a degenerate priesthood, and a total departure from the spirit of the Mosaic institutions, and of true religion.

But the Jewish nation was now under the dominion of the Romans, and the Pharisees were now prevented from that political development which the spirit that animated them is ever seeking, and which it too often succeeds in obtaining. We have, therefore, only to mark the spirit in the present case, not its practical effects.

THE CHRISTIAN THEOCRACY.

In every sphere to which we direct our attention, we find a remarkable enlargement in favour of catholicity at the advent of our Saviour. We may first shew this in reference to civil government, and the exercise of human authority, one of the most important functions of man—the most necessary, or the most superfluous—the most beneficial, or the most injurious, according as it is rightly or wrongly, seasonably or unseasonably, put forth.

In an early stage of society, as has been already stated (page 138), every government has at least the form and semblance of a theocracy. The mind, during that epoch, ascribes to God all things, not immediately seen to be the doings of man, whether they be phenomena of the natural, the political, or the moral world. And it is indeed a beautiful and truly thankworthy provision of Providence, that, during that epoch, when the destructive passions are so fierce, when reason has as yet done so little to transform and restrain them, and law so little to regulate them, there should be in the human mind, and in the spirit of the times, such a sense of God. It is

only sad that man should not be led by it to any nobler conceptions of the Godhead, than those idols which unenlightened nations worship and fear. Nevertheless this tendency in the human mind, during that epoch, to regard all things as divine, is a feature very much to be commended and admired. Even in the worst cases it serves valuable purposes, and it often renders society possible where it could not otherwise exist.

God has consecrated it. He has himself given a true theocracy. The Mosaic dispensation was, as has been already shewn, a strict and true theocracy. Jehovah was the king, and from him there were immediately dispensed, not only powers enabling the magistrates under him to govern, but also the actual laws in the very forms in which they were to be administered. Such a dispensation was, however, confined to the Jews. The theocracies of the surrounding nations were merely fictions. with idols for gods, and human sacrifices and obscenities for worship. Still each people viewed itself as under a theocracy. That this was the case with the nations noticed in the sacred history, fully appears from that history itself. Whether in Egypt or in Canaan, the struggles between the Jews and their enemies were regarded on the Gentile side as well as on the Jewish, as struggles having for their object to shew whose gods were most propitious and powerful. The Jews were, however, distinguished from all the other nations, by this great peculiarity, that while, in point of fact, Jehovah their God, was the true God, they knew also that the idols in whom their enemies trusted, were vanities, and that over all the earth, there was no God but Jehovah. It was otherwise with the surrounding nations. They not only believed each in its own gods, but they admitted the power of the gods of their enemies; and hence their eagerness to capture the idols or symbols which represented them.

But not to enter on such subjects in detail, deeply interesting as is the field of inquiry, we remark here, that this state of things on the side of the Jews,—their possession by a true theocracy, sustained by a miracle; and their consciousness that they had nothing to fear from the gods of other nations, Jehovah being the only God,—this state of faith and privilege, while it developed in the Jews a heroic spirit, which none could resist, tended also to generate in that people a very exclusive spirit. Nor was this a fault, considering the circumstances in which they were then placed. On the contrary, it was a feature to be admired; for not only was exclusiveness essential to the preservation of the nation, and of the truth among them; but in such a case as theirs, intercourse with the surrounding nations was equivalent to contamination. It is no less true, however, that a spirit of exclusiveness, although in certain circumstances, and in certain respects, it may serve valuable purposes, and produce much good, or at least prevent much evil, is apt, in other circumstances, and in other respects, to generate many errors, and do much harm. And so it was with the Jews, especially during the latter ages of the theocracy.

Thus, when that form of government had nearly served its purposes, miraculous endowments, of which God is always frugal, were gradually withdrawn. And then the government, being less manifestly under God, had the boldness, on its own part, to become very arbitrary and irregular; and the people, on theirs, to become very unruly. One feature, however, which characterized the Jews to the last, was the peculiar regard which they had for their own institutions. They still looked upon them all as from God. But, unhappily, while they regarded their own in this favourable light, they scorned all others. They refused to submit to the laws of other states; and hence the character for bad subjects, which they had over all

the ancient world. Nor can they be blamed for this. The Mosaic institutions are one and all of them peculiarly incompatible with subjection and slavery on the part of those who are called upon to observe them. They were framed to subsist only till the advent of the Messiah. The same prophetic spirit which visited the dying Jacob, and foretold that the sceptre would not depart from Judah till the Shiloh came, had taught Moses that he needed not to anticipate the slavery of the chosen people.*

But the sceptre has departed, and the Shiloh is come. And what is the doctrine which He himself delivers concerning civil government? and what is the form of the theocracy which He institutes? These important points, we learn from the evangelist John. In the presence of the Roman authority, Jesus declares, and His apostles afterwards illustrate the same principle more fully, that not the Jewish only, as the Jews themselves supposed, but the Roman too, in a word, all power is of God—there is no power but of God. When the Roman proconsul, as an argument for obtaining answers from our Saviour, said to him, "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Jesus answered, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin;"† and this broad statement, which applies to all mankind a principle, which the Jews had hitherto confined to their own polity only, is repeated and developed by all the apostles.

More especially the apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, as if utterly to put a stop to the idea till then prevalent in the Church, that no power but what is associated with true religion, and emanates from within the pale of the Church, is from God, lays it down in

* Gen. xlix. 10. † John xix. 11.

these words, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God: the powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves condemnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good and thou shalt have praise of the same; for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only on account of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render, therefore, to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour." * Similarly also, the apostle Peter. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; as freemen, yet not using your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness but as bondsmen to God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." † The other apostles also deliver, implicitly at least, the same principles. We have, therefore, upon a basis of revelation, as broad as the New Testament can give to any doctrine, these two great principles, first, that all power is from God; and, secondly, that magistracy, not in a nation possessing the true religion only, but in all nations, is an insti-

* Rom. xiii. 1. † 1 Peter ii. 13.

tution of God. And of these great principles, the application which we find made by the apostles to the first converts to Christianity, is, that they should obey implicitly the laws and magistracies of the countries where, in the providence of God, they found themselves placed.

But by the side of this great principle of power and right on the part of the civil magistracy, the New Testament developes another great principle, namely, that Jesus Christ is himself a king, and that all true Christians are his subjects. In the same pretorium, and in the face of the same Roman authority, whose power He declared to be from above, even while it sat in judgment upon Him, our Saviour declares also that He Himself is a king. But how are such things compatible, the acknowledged dominion of the Romans on the one hand, and our Saviour's monarchy on the other? This He himself immediately explains when he adds, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world then would my servants FIGHT that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence." Such was His answer. And what is contained in it? Is Jesus Christ merely a nominal king, or a king in heaven only, with no rights, no realm, no subjects on earth. If His servants are not to FIGHT for Him, what means has He for securing His authority, attaching His subjects, and subduing His enemies? These points we learn from the remark which He subjoins to the answer which He gave to Pilate. Having answered that He was a king, He immediately adds, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."* His rights then are those which belong to a "witness of the truth," his realm is "the truth," his subjects are "those

* John xviii. 37.

who are of the truth," his government is "his voice," that is, THE POWER OF THE TRUTH.

Now co-ordinating these two facts, both of which thus appear to be integrant principles of the Gospel, *first*, that all powers that be, are ordinances of God; and, *secondly*, that Christ is a king whom all ought to obey, whom all who are of the truth do obey, and who rules by the power of the truth, we can easily discover the form of the Christian theocracy. Thus, on the one hand, we see mere power ever flowing down from God, and always investing itself for the time being in the actual government. Nor are we to wonder if the outgoings of this power be sometimes directed to wicked designs, though its source be divine; for God gives only the power, not the form. Nor, even in the case of a wicked magistrate, could his power be prevented from coming from God but by miracle; for it is an universal law that all power is of God. But while, on the one hand, we have thus THE POWER, descending and manifesting itself in the government, we have, on the other hand, ascending and manifesting itself in the conscience, THE VOICE OF CHRIST witnessing for the truth, and for its own authority in all and over all. These, then, are the elements of the Christian theocracy,—a divine power coming down through the few who govern, and bearing on the many, and a divine voice rising up through the many, and directed to the rulers. And now, what is the ultimate form of such a commonwealth?

From the very nature of these elements, it follows that the voice must always eventually give the form to the power. In all cases whatever, it ever is and must be so. Even in an autocrat or absolute prince, it is still a voice that gives a form to his power. It is his own voice, indeed. Still it is a voice; and so it ever must be in all cases whatever. For power is not a thing which has a form of

itself; it is essentially formless and indefinite; it is a spirit which can manifest itself only by embodying itself in something else,—in some form, in short. A voice on the other hand, is always a definite thing. It is always some particular truth—always some form. This distinction is indeed pointed at by revelation itself, when the power is said to be of God, the voice to be of Christ. For God is the Formless, the Infinite, the Universal. Christ is the Form-possessing, the Definite, the Individual.

We see, then, how a Christian theocracy, or a government in harmony with the spirit of the gospel, may be constituted. From the Christian revelation respecting power, it follows that Christian people must ever submit to the powers that be. And if these powers already act according to the forms which the voice of Christ expresses, all is right. The Christian theocracy in that state is already fully developed; and there ought to be on the part of the people not only obedience but silence, or if a voice at all, then the voice of assistance and of mutual gratulation only. But if the "powers that be," bear upon the people in forms which are not in harmony with the voice of Christ—if they are oppressive—then all who hear that voice are called upon as Christians to utter it and maintain it until the time come when the many are convinced by their witnessing; and the government conforms to what is right;—which every government must do sooner or later, else a power will arise in some other quarter, which Christians will feel to be from God, and will join and obey.

We see, then, wherein the Christian or later theocracy differs from the Jewish or former one. In the former, God gave directly the form as well as the power. He gave the very laws and ordinances, as well as the magistrates. In the later, he gives only the magistrates—He calls upon Christians to give the form, to frame the laws and institutions, the voice of Christ being given for

guidance. And in this change we are called upon to admire the deep insight which it displays beyond what immediately appears. For under the old theocracy, where the form was given as well as the power, Christianity never could have become an universal religion, at least not till there was an outward uniformity over all the human family. Society could never have advanced in civilization under it. In fact the Jewish theocracy was designed chiefly for fixing and for preventing. It was also intended for one people exclusively. But the theocracy described as Christian is, as it needs to be, capable of universal application, and admits of every variety of form. It is at once beautifully calculated to develope human nature and civilization by that exercise of reason and conscience, which it calls for; and to adapt itself to every successive change which society undergoes, as it advances in the scale of intellectual development and moral excellence.

It does not argue any defect in the Jewish economy, that it would not have answered when applied to societies and spheres of action for which it was never designed. It only argues man's imperfection, that he should have ever thought of so applying it. How illogical to argue that, because there was a Moses in Israel, therefore there ought to be a Pope in Christendom. If indeed the Pope could accredit his pretensions as Moses did his authority, by palpable miracles seen and believed and felt by all, then whatever the reasons and semblances to the contrary, we should be obliged to believe that the scheme of the old theocracy subsisted still, and should feel called upon to look up to the Pope for law in all things, as the Israelites did to Moses. But while the attempts of the court of Rome to get up miracles, shew its conviction of their necessity, the actual want of genuine miracles destroys altogether the analogy between the papacy and the theocracy, and leaves the Pope's pretensions wholly

unaccredited. If they be just and warrantable, it can only be because the voice of Christ decides in their favour; for that is the only standard of appeal as to any form of government under the Christian dispensation. But who that listens to the voice of Christ, and to that voice exclusively, believes in the Pope?

Popery did, indeed, from the very fact of its being an imitation of the old Theocracy, serve a valuable purpose during a certain epoch, to which such a constitution was peculiarly suitable. For when the exhausted forms of the society of ancient Europe were destroyed by the deluge of new life, which flowed down from the north, in the early part of the middle ages, a chaos resulted for a time, out of which the first forms of society that arose resembled those of extreme antiquity. For such a state of things, therefore, a government on the theocratic principle was peculiarly fit, and just for the same reasons then, as in remote antiquity. The human mind being in the same circumstances, displayed the same phenomena, and needed the same form of government. And it is, indeed, truly curious to observe in how many details the forms and accessories of the ancient theocracies reproduced themselves during the early part of the middle ages. But now that these times are long since gone by, the theocracy, after the purely Christian model, is what every Christian ought to strive for. What this model is, I have endeavoured, in the preceding remarks, to delineate, and beg here to recapitulate in a single sentence. God gives the power; the people (guided by the voice of Christ) must give the form,—not, however, by rebelling against existing forms, but by witnessing for such as are more just, more holy,—the state consulting for what is just, the church for what is holy.

But if this principle be true, there ought, in strict propriety, to be as many forms of Christian government as

there are of Christian society. Pervading all, there ever ought, indeed, to be an unity of spirit, because the voice of Christ is one, and the general principles of reason and conscience are every where the same; but this unity of spirit must be invested in as many varieties of forms, as there are peoples in different states of civilization; else all cannot be equally well suited. In order to this, the just and the holy, the state and the church, must be formed into varied appliances. An uniformity over all in ecclesiastical arrangements, then, can only be best when society shall have become uniform in other respects likewise.

We see, then, what a fine display of catholicity true religion exhibited, in reference to civil government, at the advent of Christ, and the commencement of the gospel era. The people of God were no longer reckoned children, to be regulated and guided, in every particular of conduct, by a positive precept. The age of the manhood of the church is now arrived. The law is no longer announced in so many set phrases addressed to the outward ear. The law written on the heart,—reason and conscience, scripture and grace, co-operating and mutually assisting,—must now develope the laws and institutions of the Christian era. And thus man, in following Jesus in the regeneration, and under Him resuming the image of God, is not only "renewed in the inner man to righteousness and true holiness," but is even likened unto God in this, that each Christian man, in the little society of which he is a member, is called upon to be a little Providence within his own sphere, to discover his special gifts, and to exercise them for the enlightenment and well-being of the circle through which his influence extends. Plainly, therefore, by the advent of the Messiah, humanity was greatly exalted in all that relates to society and the economy of this world. Let us now inquire how it went at this blessed epoch with doctrinal religion.

THE SACRIFICE.

The Messiah is at once the great high priest and the holy sacrifice; in a word, He is the sum and substance of all sacrificial religion, the object from whom, as to the past, every priest ordained by men derived whatever sacerdotal powers he ever legitimately possessed or exercised, from whom every drop of blood that had ever been shed in sacrifice derived its virtue to take away sin, and in whom, as to the future, all sacrifices ceased.

This is so palpably set forth in the epistle to the Hebrews, that it is wonderful how any one can admit the canonicity of that epistle, and yet maintain another doctrine. "When Christ cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldst not; but a body hast thou prepared for me. In burnt-offerings and sin-offerings thou hadst no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God. Above he saith, Sacrifice and offering, and burnt-offerings, and sin-offerings, thou wouldst not, and hadst no pleasure therein (namely, those that are offered according to the law). Then he said, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. *He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.* By which will expiation is made for us, through the offering of the body of Christ once for all. Now every priest standeth ministering daily, and offering frequently the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But Christ, when he had offered one ever-efficacious sacrifice for sins, sat down at the right hand of God, henceforth waiting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering, he hath perfected for ever those for whom expiation is made. Moreover the Holy Spirit testifieth this to us, for after having said before, "this is the covenant which I will make with them after

those days, saith the Lord. I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them. And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. Now, where remission of these is, an offering for sin is no longer necessary." *

This extract, which is only a part of the apostle's argument, sets forth as plainly as any language can set forth a truth, that the true religion is no longer sacrificial otherwise than by its relation to the death of Christ. It clearly shews that sacrifice is no longer a part of worship. Is it not deeply to be deplored, therefore, that the Church of Rome should regard the Eucharist as a sacrifice, and that the pious in that communion should look to the altar and not to heaven for the body of their Saviour? But here, marking the apostle's argument, let us rather observe how much the true religion is by the abolition of sacrifices and the new emphasis given to the law written on the heart, assimilated to the religion of Paradise again. Let us mark the new call upon reason and conscience, and the duty of maintaining, as well as the privilege of enjoying, the newly gotten liberty of the sons of God. "We were never in bondage to any man," said the Jews. "If the Son shall make you free," answered the Saviour, "you shall be free indeed," and in similar terms do all the apostles write. They call upon the Christian converts everywhere to emancipate themselves from a religion of symbolism and of the beggarly elements of this world, which did not profit them that had been occupied therein.†

In the Mosaic economy, the principle of Unity rendered so necessary by the universal tendency to Polytheism on all hands, was so strongly brought out, that not only was the unity of the Godhead very largely and explicitly maintained, while that of the Trinity was left

* Heb. x. † Heb. xiii. 9.

for more full development afterwards, but worship was permitted only in one place, and only after a certain manner—all which institutions served most valuable purposes, not only for the time then being, but for the instruction of mankind generally. But now that economy has passed away, the age of variety as well as of unity, and of realities as well as of symbolism, is come; and more particularly, the grand principle of Catholicity in the most important of all matters is fully and emphatically revealed. These were the last words of Jesus Christ, "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and so I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

THE MINISTRY.

But how went it now with the priesthood? It has been just shewn that, by the death of Christ, all further sacrifice was superseded and rendered impious. But to offer sacrifice is the most characteristic function of a priest, and when we come to make some remarks on the primitive church, we shall find that no place was left in it for a priesthood properly so called. Meantime let us see how it went with the priesthood extant at the birth of our Saviour. Since the Messiah himself is, as has been already stated, to become the great high priest to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, let us first inquire in what class of society he becomes incarnate. And, in a word, does he choose the sacerdotal order? No. He is born of the tribe of Judah, of which Moses says nothing concerning priesthood.* Does he then dignify his birth

* Heb. viii. 10.

and provide for the religion which He is to spread by choosing His ministers from the sacerdotal class? No, He keeps wholly aloof from it. The apostles are poor Galilean fishermen. The seventy are such as come to Him. Nay, others are permitted to perform miracles in His name, who were not commissioned by Him at all, or at least not acknowledged by the apostles.*

Well; but though our Saviour did not belong to the sacerdotal order, nor choose His disciples from it, did He not at least commend the Scribes and Pharisees, who, in the eyes of the people, were looked upon as the oracles and representatives of all that was most religious? No. It is against them, their traditions, their multiplied and yet wholly superficial purifications, their burdensome yet trivial ritual, their punctilious observance of legal trifles, and their neglect of justice, judgment, and truth, that He levels his most severe and almost the only severe denunciations that He ever uttered!

Still, however, be it well observed, that in nought that He says against them does He give the slightest warrant to those who take upon them to apply the like denunciations to a priesthood, merely because it is a ministry of religion, or to a ministry of religion, merely because they call it a priesthood. Those who do so have much to answer for; and they need not go to the word of God seeking an excuse. Every page of it condemns them. But here let us remark only, that before our Saviour utters a word against the Scribes and Pharisees, he sanctions their office, and charges the people to listen to what they command, and to obey them. "The Scribes and Pharisees (says He) sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not."† Then follow His denunciations which bring under the eye

* Mark ix. 39. † Matthew xxiii.

so graphically the marks of a degenerate priesthood, and the sins to which that order has in all ages been so prone, that we request the reader to peruse it before proceeding farther. It is recorded in Matthew's Gospel, chap. xxiii. from the 13th verse to the end.

So hateful to the Son of the God of Love is the hypocritical persecuting spirit of a degenerate and self aggrandizing priesthood. Still, however,—let us repeat it,—He sanctioned the institution, and even the authority of the very men whom He denounced. Bad as the teachers of religion were, He himself called upon the people to obey them. He only pointed out their hypocrisy, and charged the people not to imitate them.

PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY.

On His own part our Saviour propounded a religion the very reverse of that into which the Scribes and Pharisees had degraded the religion of Moses. He devoted His whole time to working gratuitously miracles of goodness, and to recalling the minds of men to the great principles of spiritual piety and pure morality, which the teachers then extant had altogether sunk or obscured under a multitude of trivial observances. In opposition to the undue emphasis and exorbitant value which they attached to the strict observance of a certain ritual in its own exact forms, times, and places, He proclaims the mighty principle that the time is now come when the true worshipper is to worship God, neither in Judea exclusively, nor in Samaria exclusively, but—free from restrictions as to time and place—in spirit and in truth.* He places the essence of religion in trust in God, and love to Him as manifested in and through Himself; He

* John iv. 21.

lays the essence of worship in prayer ; He urges upon all, the necessity of holiness, and He commends and exemplifies the most exalted morality which the world ever heard of. On this He lays peculiar emphasis. "Not every one (says He) who says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he who doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven."* "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."† And of this will, in reference to His disciples, He declares, again and again, that its first element is, that they should love one another. Nay, this He gives as the very criterion of discipleship. "By this (says He) shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." This love, which He commands his disciples to entertain, He calls a new commandment. Do you wonder at this ? So it was. So it is. Who in the wide world observes it ? Why, the man who maintains it, even in words merely, is thought weak. It was not (said Pope Julius) till after Peter had struck the servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear, that our Saviour told him to put up his sword in his sheath. And this saying is full of point. Papist or Protestant, it makes little difference here. Fallen nature will out. Men will fight. But it can only be at their peril that Christians quarrel. For while our Saviour himself enjoins love, as has been stated, His beloved and fully-inspired disciple John goes the length of saying that "whoso hateth his brother is a murderer." ‡

But let us not here agitate our spirits by looking to the world. Let us return to Christ and His first ministers, whose labours in the good cause even their enemies observing, exclaimed, "Behold how these Christians love one another." The apostles and the seventy, divinely empowered to make known the mind of Christ,

* Matt. vii. 21. † Matt. xii. 50. ‡ John iii. 5.

and miraculously gifted for producing conviction in those whom they addressed, directed their attention towards the same great principles which their Master had taught and exemplified. But this was not all. These great principles were now enriched and completed by the doctrine of the cross, which, as it was not "finished" till the death of Christ, could not be fully developed till after that event. The Epistles, therefore, are a necessary supplement to the Gospels; and in order to seize upon the unity of the faith, and to avoid resting in partial and fragmentary views of it, an equal regard must be had to both. We will not attempt here, however, to give a summary of what is to be found there. Such summaries are already very numerous. Far better go to the originals. Suffice it here to say, that (1.) the necessity of repentance in order to the remission of sins; (2.) the sufficiency of believing the gospel in order to salvation; (3.) the necessity of the love of God in order to true religion, and (4.) the love of each other in order to true discipleship to Jesus, —these were the great articles of primitive Christianity, these were the elements of primitive catholicism.

But besides the full and direct statement of such great principles, very much of a more particular nature is found both in the Gospels and Epistles. And here we must not fail to remark, that of all collateral subjects, that on which the apostles bestow most pains, is the endeavour to persuade the Christian converts, while they embraced the salvation of Christ, to embrace also the liberty with which Christ had set them free, to leave off from the complicated ceremonials and positive institutions of the preceding order of things, which had now fulfilled its term, and to walk, like the patriarchs of old, by reason and conscience, ennobled by the faith of Christ, and enlightened by His voice and spirit. The faith itself explained, this was the next great object of their preaching.

In every discourse and epistle they appeal to the reason and conscience of those whom they address. They rest very little upon mere authority. They rather avoid appealing to it. Hence the form of the apostolic epistles; which may, of course, be taken as types of the apostles' preaching. Each consists of two parts; *first*, an argument addressed to the reason, in order to establish the faith of the converts on reasonable grounds, and put them in a position in which they would both be secure from being tossed about by every wind of doctrine (which is very much the case when the faith lies in the sensibilities merely, and not in the reason), and also be able to give to every one that asked them a reason for the hope that was in them; and, *second*, a practical part addressed to conscience, and consequently recognising and appealing to its supremacy.

Much of the argumentative parts of the epistles, especially those of St Paul, may be described as the development of the theory of the Mosaic economy; whence it followed, that, far from arguing any thing like mutability in God, its abrogation then, or rather its transformation into Christianity, was the very plan and principle of it from the beginning. The apostles inform us, that a complicated ritual, a law of outward and positive precepts, such as that under which the people of God had been laid till then, however divine in its origin, and however binding, from the days of Moses till those of Christ, was not in itself an object of the divine complacency; they shew that it was the form of religion suitable to the childhood of the church only; they shew that this childhood was then past,—that Christ was come to establish a new order of things,—come to do what was to give God pleasure, from the very nature of the thing done, namely, to make expiation for sin once for all, and setting the pious for ever free from sacrifices and ceremonials, to

call upon them to obey the law written on their hearts,—a law in obeying which there is not only that which is pleasing to God, but that which has in itself a great reward. Hence the earnest endeavours of the apostles, to persuade those whom they addressed to believe in a once-crucified, but now highly-exalted Redeemer, to trust in him for justification before God, not in the law of Moses, and to regulate their lives by those faultless moral precepts which Jesus taught in His discourses, and exemplified in His life.

As to externals, the chief endeavour of the apostles was to induce the Christian converts, on the one hand, to abandon the ritual in which they had been educated, which was now superseded by the advent, and replaced by Christian liberty; and to induce the heathen converts, on the other, to refrain from adopting the ritual of the Jews, when they abandoned the rites of paganism. To the ceremonies which they abrogated, the apostles do, indeed, assign the valuable place of tutors and governors, until the time appointed by the Father. But they shew also, in very explicit terms, that these ceremonies were not designed by Jehovah to be perpetual, but only to regulate and educate the childhood of the church when it came out of the dark womb of Egypt.

In teaching Christian liberty, however, the apostles only partially succeeded. Educational prepossessions and prejudices are not to be overcome, except in a very few. And though the ritual against which the apostles directed their preaching, stood only in meats and drinks, and diverse washings and cardinal ordinances, imposed on the church, till the time of reformation; still, to their great grief, the apostles had occasion to utter such exclamations as these: "How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage! Ye observe days and months, and times and

years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed on you labour in vain." *

Nor were these fears groundless or applicable to those times only. Judaizing has been the great error in the Christian church from age to age, down to the present day. The tendency to place religion in the sensibilities and the imagination, rather than in the reason and conscience, and consequently in forms addressed to the senses, rather than in spiritual truths addressed to the understanding and the heart, is inveterately strong in the nature of fallen man. And it is so much more easy to obey any authority addressed to the outward ear, than the still small voice of conscience, so much more easy to recognise the supremacy of another power than to master self, that, just as in the childhood of the church, when nothing else would do, so is there still a great demand on the part of the many, for positive institutions and precepts. Nay, worse than this, it is so hard to give up all hope from self, and to trust entirely in the merits of another for salvation, that man will rather put himself under a self-invented bondage, and serve all his life under the fear of death, in the hope of saving himself by his own endeavours, than embrace the liberty with which Christ hath made His people free, and worship and obey through love, Him who is already his Saviour, and as such calls every believer to virtue and to holiness.

THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.

Such were the objects to which the apostles directed their labours almost exclusively,—the glory of God in the mission of Christ, and the salvation of men through him. But in revealing these objects, they did not go

* Gal. iv. 9.

by stated rule, but by immediate inspiration. Far from giving any examples of those rubrics and rituals, afterwards framed (the *Rituale Romanum*, for instance, my copy of which is a goodly quarto, the first fifty-two pages filled with rules how to perform the sacraments of baptism, and the next ten with rules how to perform the sacrament of penitence, and so on), the apostles seem only to have considered what forms, congenial with the spirituality of the gospel, would be most likely to succeed in persuading men to believe in a once-crucified, but now risen Saviour. Thus, his rule of proceeding, the apostle Paul lays down in these words:—"Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."

With regard to the form and constitution of the churches, which resulted from their ministry, the apostles, when compared with most who have come after them, were but little solicitous. They acted on the great and undeniable principle, that, wherever there are Christians, a church will form itself spontaneously, and needs only to be organized and regulated as circumstances require; in order to which, a Christian spirit in the members will of itself be sufficient. Hence they directed their chief endeavours to the preaching of the gospel, and to the making of converts. And as to the

churches which resulted, it happened as the apostles knew it would. Those who were converted, who believed and trusted in the common Saviour, and were persecuted and hated by all around, naturally felt drawn to each other; and from the very state of their hearts, and their position in society, they formed a communion among themselves; in other words, a church. This the apostles then organized and regulated as was best for the interests of those concerned. But so general are the terms in which they intimate their proceedings, and give their rules, that Christians in the present day are greatly divided in opinion, as to the form and constitution of the primitive churches. Thus, many maintain that the episcopacy which the apostles established was prelatical, —many that it was on the principle of presbyterian parity. Many maintain also that there existed an ecclesiastical jurisdiction, extending over all the churches, and recognising all as one; and not a few, that each primitive church was independent of the others, and complete in itself. Now this difference of opinion is just what we should expect, if we suppose that, on the subject of ecclesiastical constitution, the apostles brought the doctrine of Christian liberty to bear in all its fulness. And, in point of fact, so they did. Taking the synagogue and the sanhedrim as the basis on which they built, they appear to have been guided in the superstructure by the necessities of the particular churches for which they legislated, and the spiritual interests of the converts. Thus, it was not merely for the sake of the institution, but when a murmuring began between the Greeks and Hebrews through neglecting the widows, that deaconry was instituted; and then it was just for the purpose of meeting that emergency, and similar cases in the future. It is also to be observed, that when the election of deacons thus became necessary, the apostles

devolved almost the whole business upon the congregation. They made the election popular. But though in this case the result appears to have been very satisfactory, they did not adopt the same mode of proceeding in their universal practice, or in reference to the appointment of those who exercised spiritual functions in the churches. In point of fact, what was most appropriate for the comparatively enlightened converts of Jerusalem might have been altogether unfit for provincial and distant churches, formed of comparatively rude elements, and with scarcely any thing in common but the essentials of the one faith. And, in harmony with this state of matters in different regions, the apostles, so far as we can learn, organized their little groups of converts, so as to have a single eye to the moral excellence, the spiritual enlightenment, and mutual love of the converts,—things for the sake of which all ministry is designed. In a word, the first teachers of Christianity never lost sight of the main objects of the ministry, namely, the conversion of men to the faith of Christ, and the building up of those who were converted already. To these grand objects they made all forms subservient. And so perfect is the liberty in which the Scriptures have left us, in reference to the organisation of particular churches; in other words, so distinctly are we called upon to give a form to the spirit of the gospel in such details, and to suit them by the right use of reason to the spiritual wants of the particular people to whom the gospel is preached, that the search has been made in vain all through the New Testament, for arguments on the subject of ecclesiastical constitution, that settle the point. Each inquirer generally comes away from the perusal of the sacred page, convinced the more deeply the longer he inquires, that his own prepossession is the truth of the matter. The Episcopalian finds many arguments. The Presbyterian

finds many arguments. The Independent finds many arguments; each in favour of his own view. And what polemic will ever convince the man who finds his spiritual wants supplied by the ministry to which he belongs at present (and all in harmony with the gospel so far as he can see), that he ought to abandon his church for another which is said to have higher claims? Supply such an one with arguments that he ought to change; then if he is a steady and an able man, will he not give you arguments on his side, page for page? And look at those who change from other motives than love, deference, and a desire of unity, are they not generally the weakest and most conceited? And why all this, but because the field is open?

The form of the Christian church is not defined in the Bible. The Christian is free, so far as enlightened reason and conscience are free. The kingdom of God is not an outward thing, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. That which is emphatically "the Church," is the general assembly of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. This is the house of God, the church of the living God,* and every true Christian, whether Episcopalian, Presbyterian, or Independent, feels himself to belong to the church of Christ, feels that he is a stone in that pillar and support which the church gives to the truth, when he adheres conscientiously to his own Bible-taught convictions on the subject.

But man will not be prevented from narrowing the word of God. And that frame of mind, of which self is the centre, has betrayed many an otherwise Christian spirit to believe and to maintain that there is no church but that communion to which he himself belongs. The Church of Rome is the only true church, say one and all of that communion. The Church of England is the only true church, it is "the Church;"—and the Church in

* 1 Tim. iii. 15.

Scotland means the Episcopal Church there, not the Established Church, which is no church,—say too many of the communion of England. The Church of Scotland is the beau-ideal of a Christian church; and episcopacy is to be altogether condemned, say too many of the Scotch communion; while the peasant in that country, marking, according to his far-seeing but rude sagacity, that attachment to particular churches is a thing of hereditary prepossession, not individual conviction, calls the Episcopalian, "ane o' the Charlie persuasion," alluding to the later names of the Stuart dynasty.

After Christ himself, the Christian church is said in scripture to be founded on the apostles. And every one must agree, that this may indeed be truly said of it. For to whom do we owe the testimony of the most important fact in our religion, the resurrection of our Lord? It is to the apostles. To whom do we owe the development of the characteristic doctrine of Christianity, that of the atonement? to whom do we owe all, in a word, which could not be brought to light till after Christ's death? To the apostles. Well then may the church be called apostolic, from spiritual considerations exclusively. And, no doubt, the more we regard the apostles in a spiritual point of view, the more transparent do we keep the medium between ourselves and Christ who is head over all.

To be wholly, or even duly, spiritual, in our regards to such an order of men as the apostles, however, is not easy. They themselves were very much troubled, by desires, on the part of their converts, to confer honours and dignities upon them, of which they were nowise ambitious. So long, indeed, as people feel that the ministers of religion are their superiors, they will always honour them; and the latter, if disposed for despotism, will never find it difficult to form themselves into a sacerdotal class. Nay, if the people be very ignorant, and yet much alive to religious feelings,

priests may always obtain divine honours if they please. We see this tendency to adore mere men, in instances where we would scarcely have expected it. Even Cornelius, notwithstanding his great illumination, fell down and worshipped the apostle Peter. But by such admiration and homage the apostles were very much distressed; and it is altogether wonderful how the Church of Rome countenances such ongoings on the part of her people still. When Cornelius fell down, Peter took him up, saying, "Stand up, I myself also am a man."* And yet not a day but hundreds, both clergy and laity, fall down on their knees even to the bronze image of the same apostle, which sits frowning in a well-managed obscurity in the cathedral of St Peter at Rome. In like manner, at Lystra, the people desired to pay divine honours to Paul and Barnabas. But there too, similarly to Peter, yet more deeply distressed by the proffered homage, the two apostles rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, "Sirs, why do ye these things, we also are men of like passions with you."

Nor are these accidents all the evidence we have of the aversion of the apostles to be thus signalized. St Paul chides the Corinthians sharply, for the eminence which they were giving to their ministers, some to this, some to that apostle; and not only because they were thus creating schisms, but because they were doing wrong in glorying in men at all. This he wholly forbids, asking such questions as these, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" And the subject of apostolic dignity he thus winds up, "Let a man so account of us as the servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

Still the apostles were not behind on the proper oc-

* Acts x. 27.

casions in asserting their own dignity, and if they did not always exert their authority, they let it be known that it was not because they wanted the power. And as the former view of the position of the apostles in the church may be carried to such a length, as to give the Independent ground to stand upon, so may the latter be pressed so as to convince almost every churchman that he is in the right, when he invests the apostles with peculiar dignity, and bishops after them,—if he be satisfied as to the doctrine of apostolic succession. Each view has many arguments in its own favour. And, in like manner, with regard to the relative dignity of the teachers of religion now (who are in point of fact at least the successors or representatives of the first teachers), there are good reasons for maintaining a parity among them all, when one condition of the multitude of believers and of the clergy is looked to—good reasons for maintaining a prelacy among them, when another condition of the multitude of believers and of the clergy is looked to. Nay, the primacy of St Peter may be made out in such a way as may easily be conceived to satisfy good men. Let a man have a certain tone of mind, or be taking a certain view of the field of ministerial labour, he is sure to be persuaded by one set of arguments in favour of one view. Let another have another tone of mind, or be taking another view of the field, he is sure to be persuaded by another set of arguments in favour of another view. Nor is there any possibility of preventing this variety in the convictions of different men, but by preventing the variety in their gifts and opportunities. But these are in the hands of God, not in ours. And if it be His will, and the order which He has established in the church, that in the unity of the spirit there should be variety of gifts, and that to one should be given one, to another another, it is surely ours to as-

sent, nay, to embrace His will, and to perceive that this is our calling as spiritual men, to maintain the unity of the spirit in the midst of variety in forms, and to recognise all equally as members of "The Church," and to wish grace, mercy, and peace unto all who love the Lord Jesus, and call upon his name in sincerity.

But while it thus appears to be our calling to entertain this latitude of belief respecting these circumstantials in the constitution of the primitive churches, it is equally our calling, when taking a candid view of the matter, to mark that the Christian church and ministry were built upon the synagogue and sanhedrim, not upon the temple service and the priesthood. These words of the apostle, already quoted, "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second," directly refer to this, and intimate it. The whole temple service and priestly office had respect to Christ and His sacrifice, and culminated when He was stretched on the cross, and terminated when the veil was rent. The apostles were not a continuation of the priesthood. They were taken from another fountain altogether; and they were the beginning of a new order altogether. Their positions and calling were those of prophets rather than priests.

But yet neither were they truly prophets. They were apostles; and whether we regard the next race or order of Christian ministers whom they appointed, as their successors technically or not, certain it is that, in those days of inspiration and purity, we find no traces of a return to the practice of sacrifice and the temple order and service. It is easy to see, however, that as soon as the truth degenerated, such a return might be expected, partly because of the greater pleasure which sacrifice and symbolism always give to the imagination, partly because the religions of all the surrounding nations lay chiefly in such sacrifices and symbolism. Accordingly,

Christianity did soon degenerate into this materialist state, and such it is in the Church of Rome to this day.

In the first century, indeed, we see the spirit and economy of the gospel in finer display than it has been often, if ever, seen since. The religious instruction of the first Christians, their attainments in Christian knowledge, were perhaps comparatively small. They would have made but poor polemics. But by the miracles which they saw, the word they heard, the spirit they had, they were convinced of their sins, converted to Christ, and lived forthwith, exemplifying the Christian graces; and more particularly displaying that criterion of Christianity which our Saviour gave when he said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another." *

How truly Christian is the state of things which the book of the Acts represents as existing among the first believers! When three thousand were converted in a single day, doubtless there must have been great differences among them; doubtless had each written out his religious knowledge and belief, in the form of a confession, there would have been great variety of knowledge and opinion expressed by different individuals. Except in the very essence, the very unity of the faith, scarcely two of them could be expected to be at one. But this variety did in no degree interfere with the unity of spirit which animated them all. "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. Neither was there any among them that lacked: but as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things which were sold." †

* Matt. xviii. 3. John iii. 3. Luke xiii. 1. Matt. iii. 7. Acts iii. 38. Rom. iii. 10. 1 John v. 19. † Acts iv. 32, 34.

Nor was it only in Jerusalem that such unity and such charity reigned. Even in Corinth, where the greatest abuses had crept into the Church from the idolatry out of doors; and where, even in the midst of miraculous endowments, the spirit of the world had made fearful inroads, we still find love, in the form of charity, obtaining commendation from the apostle.* In like manner also, in reference to the churches of the Ephesians, the Colossians, and the Thessalonians, we find the apostle giving thanks to God for the faith and love of the converts, and on these grounds rejoicing, in terms of which the following may be taken as the general tenor:—"As touching brotherly love, ye need not that I write unto you, for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another." By a blessed baptism in the fountain of love, all difference of caste was lost. All were made to belong to the same caste, and that a caste more honourable than any that the world could bestow. In Christ Jesus there were neither bond nor free. All were one in Him. And the whole formed a beautiful example exhibited in life, of that divine law which our Saviour gave when he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."†—A law which, in so far as it relates to our fellow-creatures, was repeated and expounded by Paul, when he said, "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another, for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying,

* 2 Cor. viii. ix. † Matt. xxii. 37. Mark xii. 30.

namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." *—And most tenderly yet pressingly urged by the disciple who leant on Jesus's breast, when, in extreme old age, unable any longer to preach the word, he wrote to the Christian converts in these touching terms, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. If we love one another God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby we know that we dwell in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit." †

Such are the apostolic precepts on this subject, and such was the primitive practice. But, along with this beautiful unity in spirit, we can easily gather from scripture, what reason assures us and the more detailed history of the church establishes, that there was great variety in the circumstances of different churches in different places. A full liberty appears to have been granted to Christian wisdom to exercise itself in devising, for each individual church, that organization and those measures which necessity urged or forethought approved, as the best for giving stability to the infant church. As to the intercourse which obtained at this epoch between church and church, it seems just to have been a fine repetition between bodies each composed of many individuals, of the communion we have already seen to take place between single persons in the first ages, when Abraham and Melchizedec met in the Plain of Peace, Moses and Jethro at the Mount of God.

* Rom. xiii. 8. † 1 John iv. 7.

However great the variety in forms and mere externals between the first converts, there was a perfect unity of spirit. It was quite enough, in order to mutual affection and communion, that they should be Christians. And not only is the scene which the church then presents to us beautiful to contemplate ; it is also most instructive. The church increased rapidly. No contempt, no persecution, no death, could stop its ascendency over the hearts of men. And would it not be the same still if Christians were Christians still ? The blows which Popery on the one hand, and Infidelity on the other, are dealing right and left on the churches of the Reformation, are they not just what our schisms deserve and justify ? And, unless we repent and return to our first love, were it not a righteous thing in God to take the vineyard from us, and give it unto others who will bring forth the fruits thereof ?

It is vain to imagine that mere intellect will ever make out, to the satisfaction of all good men, that any one form of ecclesiastical polity is exclusively divine. And to take this high ground in the present state of the argument, is either to display ignorance of the state of the question, or to act the schismatic. But, on the other hand, let each take a fair view of the arguments which influence good men who differ from him, and is there not reason to believe that there would soon result such a good understanding among all, that our mutual differences would continually decrease until there would ultimately result over all a rich uniformity, built up of all the particulars which each admired and found in the Bible ? A polemical spirit will never bring men together. It is a thing altogether human. But calmness and candour, conjoined with Christian forbearance and sustained by union prayer meetings, would do more in a few years than almost any would now be willing to believe. Help from the upper sanctuary might be confidingly expected.

THE MEDIÆVAL CHURCH.

But the blessed spirit which animated the primitive church did not long continue. The miraculous attestations of Christianity, its reasonableness and internal moral beauty, soon attracted many persons who were more remarkable for their philosophical pretensions than for their pious dispositions. These embraced it. But as their minds were generally too much made up already to be open to experience the transforming power of the truth, they very naturally began to transform that truth into a more close agreement with the philosophical systems which prepossessed themselves. Faith was thus attenuated into philosophical belief; and the doctrines of the gospel were involved in all the uncertainty of academic speculation. Schisms and heresies were therefore to be expected at this time; and in fact they began to prevail. But these were not the only diseases which now broke out in the Christian community.

The churches, as they continued to gather, were composed in a great measure of Pharisees on the one hand, who were possessed of an irradicable love of sacerdotal importance, and of converted heathens on the other, who were still, more or less, under the influence of their heathen education. But that was all in favour of a worship consisting mainly in rites and ceremonies designed to affect the imagination, and of a mysterious deference to the priest, as a being in some respects supernatural. The mystery of spiritual despotism, therefore, did already work; and, instead of the simple and spiritual worship of the primitive church, we have plainly to expect, in the coming age, a ritual unbefittingly symbolical and materialist. To produce the latter effect, indeed, other circumstances conspired with the heathen education of many of the converts. In fact, it is only in a rural state of society, such

as that of the Patriarchs, when the human race is distributed in individual families, and all nature around seems to breathe of God, and invites to contemplation of Him, or else in that advanced state of civilization when the intellect is very fully developed, that the mass of worshippers will remain long contented with a mode of worship altogether pure and spiritual, and divested of all material symbolism. In the crowded city, indeed, from which nature and its sacredness are excluded, and where contemplation is more difficult and less congenial than in the country, and where the engrossment of the sensibilities in a play of social emotions, leaves less for the exalted feelings of religion, it is to be feared that people, in all ordinary states of society, whether intellectual or not, and whatever their religion, will ever tend to introduce much that is merely formal and material into their acts of worship, in order to open the pleasing sphere of the imagination when they enter the church, that they may enjoy there what they cannot enjoy in the street.

It was only to be expected, therefore, that, subsequently to the apostolic age, the simplicity of the worship of the primitive church should undergo a degradation, and become more and more formal, materialist, and symbolical; that it should return, in short, to what worship was before the Incarnation. And are we to expect that the ministers of religion will resist this tendency, in order to sustain the spirituality and liberty of the Christian people? or, are we not rather to expect, that, in the circumstances which we have mentioned, they will encourage it, in order to facilitate their own ascendency? The desire of such ascendency is natural to man. But the more rites and ceremonies in worship, the more indispensable the priest; and, consequently, the more easy his ascent into supreme influence and power. Doubtless, there will be good and bad amongst the priesthood, as in all other classes of the com-

munity. Certain it is, however, in point of fact, that a sacerdotal spirit, aiming at an unchristian ascendency, very soon made its appearance in the Christian Church; had, emanating from it, there soon appeared also a materialist ritual, accompanied by multifarious positive precepts, of which we find no traces in the primitive worship, and which nothing could have induced a Christian ministry to introduce, but the consciousness that the people had a demand for it,—or possibly such a consideration as this, that the people needed it in order to awake and sustain their devotion. Not that this would be the only excuse of the ecclesiastics. They might build on the doctrine of ordination, under which they might maintain that they were warranted to enact as they thought right. They might build on the Mosaic dispensation, of which the proceedings of the priesthood, and positive institutions, formed so conspicuous a part. They might build on the reproaches brought by the heathen against them which were made their excuse for persecuting them, namely, that they had neither altars, nor sacrifices, nor priests, nor temples, and were consequently atheists,—reproaches these, which, of course, could no longer be made when all these things were introduced into the church. They might have many excuses (excuses which, no doubt, would satisfy the consciences of many), that, in reverting to a symbolic worship, they were acting rightly, while yet, in point of fact, they were only ministering to the original taste which the religious sensibilities of fallen man ever have for symbolism and a rubric, rather than for true and spiritual worship. But whatever the causes, certain it is, that, after the primitive era, we see the sacerdotal spirit in the clergy, and materialism in worship gaining ground, century after century.

That many advantages resulted by and by, both from the ascendency which the spiritual power had attained,

and from the palpable forms in which it had clothed Christian worship as the times increased in barbarism, cannot be denied. But this can only be granted when we compare the influence of the church with the absence of a church altogether. It were easy to maintain that far greater advantages would have resulted had the church been animated during this epoch by the true spirit and genius of Christianity. And, in point of fact, if certain advantages resulted from the too despotical episcopacy already established, great evils resulted also. Thus, already, in the third century, we find many bishops directing almost all their zeal towards matters of mere external embellishment and mere ecclesiastical police. And, as might be expected, we find, along with this frame of mind, a demand in the same quarters for universal uniformity, and consequently a display of that rigourism by which alone such an attempt can be made with any hopes of success. Thus, in these days, the Bishop of Rome excommunicates first the Asiatic churches, and then the African, because they would not agree to his views about the baptism of heretics,—views to which we find nothing analogous in the New Testament, and which were nothing better than technical difficulties created by the ecclesiastical spirit of the times.

Still we should have had great cause of rejoicing, had the Church never degenerated farther than it had done as yet. But the time is now come when Christianity has, for the first time, to meet the full sunshine of prosperity; and this has in every case been found the greatest of all trials to piety and virtue. The time is past, at least for a season, when the gospel is to be preached by martyrdom. A change has come over the spirit of the times. The martyrs, by opposing their heroic spirit to the heroic spirit of the Romans, have won the victory. They have made a mighty display of that spirit which alone a Ro-

man could admire; and they have carried the Romans. Christianity now commands the sympathies of the nation. It needs now only a formal recognition by the court to become the professed religion of the empire. Nor does it wait long for this. The emperor is not behind his people. Constantine declares for Christianity. In the arena of the Coliseum, where, but a short time before, Christians had been exposed to be torn by wild beasts for the savage entertainment of the people, the cross is planted, and the people are free to worship the Saviour. Christianity has now the ascendant. No more persecution; nothing but favour now. And what is the result? For a time all seems sunshine. All promises well. But can this continue? No. It now became as much the interest of the heathen priesthood to adopt Christianity for their religion as it was to persecute it before. Doubtless, therefore, the many would adopt it; for the many are ever forward in doing what is for their own interest. But we cannot suppose that they would adopt it from such motives as these, without adapting it also, as much as possible, to heathenism, their own religion. During this epoch, therefore, there is every reason to believe that Christianity would undergo a new deterioration.

Then came Julian, who strove to undo all that Constantine had done in favour of Christianity; and there was now the same temptation to the Christian priesthood to resume the rites of Paganism, that there was in the preceding reign for the pagan priests to assume the practices of Christianity. Both the flood-tide and the ebb, therefore, at this period of the history of the Church, were calculated to inundate the Church with the popular superstitions, and to mingle much of paganism in the Christian worship. And, accordingly, century after century the Church deteriorates, and expresses in all its features the growing degeneracy and barbarism of the

times. Christian worship, instead of consisting in the simple prayer, the discourse, the hymn of the primitive church, becomes now a cumbrous mass of ceremonies, composed of the beggarly elements of the world. The priesthood, forgetful of the express declaration of St Paul, lord it over God's heritage, not in matters of practice only, but of faith too. Unlike the practice of the apostolic Church, the people now, instead of having a voice in the affairs of the church (in such a matter as the election of deacons for instance), are allowed no voice whatever. The clergy represent themselves as the Church. Whatever is to be done, they do it all.

If it be asked how a Christian people allowed themselves to be thus lorded over and excluded, it is to be considered that the clergy were greatly their superiors in knowledge, and consequently in power; and that tyrannous as the Christian priesthood might be, compared with what they ought to have been, yet the people had been accustomed to far worse tyranny under the Pagan and Druidical priesthoods, which preceded the dominion of the Church. It may indeed be truly said of the spiritual despotism of the Church during the middle ages, as of the feudal lords over the people as serfs, that though both are very bad compared with what prevails now both in Church and State, over all the enlightened regions of Europe, still both were deliverances to the people at the time when they first came into being. The preceding paganism and slavery were much more tyrannical than the ecclesiastical and feudal powers to which the people were now made to submit. Farther, while we see so much to censure in the extravagant episcopacy of the middle ages, and feel called upon to characterize popery as at once contrary to the spirit of the gospel, and positively denounced by it, let us not fail to recognise the hand of a gracious God in so directing the course of his

providence that, in the midst of much doctrinal error and unwarrantable usurpation, there was also at this time such strength and unity in the European Church, arising partly from the fact that the clerical office was open to all ranks, and formed of all classes cemented together, and partly from the inherent strength and unity of an episcopacy, that the Christian religion in this quarter of the globe survived the shock which dismembered the Roman empire itself, and inverted the whole order of things which existed before. In the East and in Africa, on the other hand, where no such powerful hierarchy existed in the church, Mahomedism prevailed over Christianity, and all but extinguished it.

But the Roman empire fallen, and Europe now overrun with barbarians, the affairs of the Church, viewed in relation to its primitive constitution, went on from bad to worse. The Christian ministry formed now out of the barbarous and daring races of the north, who had established themselves over the empire, carried their usurpations to as high a pitch as had ever been done by any heathen priesthood. The type of a priesthood given in a preceding page,* and borrowed from India, fails rather by defect than excess. There is, however, this marked difference between the two, that the Indian priesthood had the wisdom to contrive their system so, that it should not be supreme in one age only but permanently supreme. The Brahmins are family men, heads of houses. They have sons who are Brahmins like their fathers. The priesthood is hereditary. Hence it could become, and it soon became a caste. But the celebacy of the clergy prevented the Romish priesthood from attaining the stability of a caste. Viewed even as a piece of ecclesiastical polity, it was a foolish institution. It hastened the downfall of the supremacy of the Church in many ways; and,

* Page 143.

more especially, it precipitated the downfall of the sacerdotal order by the cruel and lustful, in a word, inhuman character which such an institution (except in those who have the special gift) is calculated to engender in those who conform to it. When one man is seconded by another, he will do things which he would be utterly ashamed of, if he stood alone. It gives courage to a man who suspects himself of inhumanity when he finds that his feelings are not singular, but on the contrary similar to those which animate and urge his companions. Hence men often run as bodies into greater extravagancies in crime than as individuals. And when any set of men are so circumstanced in life as to be urged by their circumstances to similar feelings and desires, then let them but come together, enter into each other's confidence, and form together an order or corporation, and each, in his endeavours at self-gratification, feels himself supported by all the others, he knows that he has at least their sympathies, nay, he knows that he has their wishes for his success, and that if he do succeed, he will be their hero, and they will be his followers. And thus, if the circumstances of the order be such as to generate guilty desires, that order, as it becomes strong in numbers, will also become strong in guilt. And so it was with the Romish priesthood.

Meantime there arose, by the side of the priesthood, and out of the same elements, a power which, though calculated at first to stimulate the clergy, to strain every nerve which policy could put forth in order to subdue it, and therefore calculated to develope the spiritual power to the utmost, yet was destined ere long to master it. Along with the ambitious priesthood there arose by its side the no less ambitious spirit of feudal heroism. And which of them shall triumph? It soon appeared that the clergy could not subdue it. They could direct it, however. Ac-

cordingly, in order to identify it as much as possible with themselves, and confound its power with their own, they gave it a devotional turn. They found a religious object for it. They bent it on the Holy Sepulchre. They set the Crusades agoing. And this scheme succeeded. Not only was the tension of the feudal heroism which pressed upon the church on all hands relieved, by having had this outlet opened for it, but many of the bravest chiefs, and consequently the most dangerous to the priesthood, were cut off in a distant land. But the victory on the side of the church was far from being complete. On the contrary, the very trophies of the triumph were ruin to the priesthood. The warriors who returned from the Crusades came home with views enlarged, by what they have seen and suffered. And the young race which speedily filled the places of those who were carried off by war, were not the barbarians which their fathers were. Their hands were not the weaker for what they had achieved in the east; and their heads and hearts are stronger for what they had learned there. Meantime the priesthood was grown more arbitrary than ever, and even insolent by its unparalleled successes. It was unsatisfied now with the exercise of the spiritual power, which could alone be maintained as its legitimate weapon. It made bold to refuse to the temporal power that which the prince has from God, that which he knows he has, and which he will yield to none. The clergy, and that in an offensive manner, began now to claim those civil immunities which were refused to other subjects. These, as we have seen, the priesthood of India has succeeded in obtaining. But in Europe where there never have been castes, and where the rights of every class of the community have always been better understood than in the East, the prince refused to grant the immunities which the church asked. He required in general terms that all who held tenures

in the state and enjoyed the privileges of government, should contribute proportionally to the support of the state. Then came the fatal moment. On this deliverance by the civil power, the priesthood drew the sword. The head of the church entered into hostile collision with the head of the feudal aristocracy. And whether shall the law or the priest conquer? We need not inquire. The time is come when both Pope and feudal prince must fall before a third power, friendly both to church and state, when rightly constituted, yet, admitting only its own supremacy, its own rightful supremacy, the supremacy of reason and conscience and word of God.

THE CHURCHES OF THE REVIVAL.

Under the dominion of Rome, Europe was an unity. The same civilizing influence spread all round from the imperial city. Authority was easily spread along with it; and thus, while civilization progressed, authority was easily maintained. But when the Roman Empire was dismembered and ultimately destroyed, and the field occupied by other races, a number of foci of the new order of civilization, and consequently of authority, were lighted up. A new order of princes—a race of feudal chiefs, each in the midst of a territory more or less circumscribed, set agoing a new order of things. And Europe from that day to this exhibits quite a contrast to what it did before the middle ages. Unity and the dominion of one were its characteristics in the days of the Roman Empire. Variety has ever since been and is now its characteristic; and the balance of power among its constituent states is now the prevalent theory of European politics. In all these features and changes the

church has naturally participated. In the church, however, as compared with the state, we note this difference, that its unity was longer in being brought to a head, and that it survived the empire for a long period. This arose partly from the circumstance that the church was an economy of a much more recent origin than the empire; and partly from this, that the ecclesiastical power always moves more slowly than the civil power. So much the better in the present instance at least. For the church thus formed a connecting link between the old and the new order of things; and while New Europe tended to be all variety, the survival of the Church of Rome every where, after the Roman Empire had completely vanished, tended powerfully to maintain a certain degree of unity in the midst of the extreme variety which was coming into her, and consequently to prevent discord and mutual destruction between the rising states. Still, however, when the hour came, and at a certain lapse of time after the empire had ceased to exist as an unity, the church, which was but an image of the empire, underwent the same transformation which the empire itself had experienced. The palpable unity became a palpable variety. And we have now no longer to speak of *the church*, but of *the churches* of the Revival of Europe; the churches of Britain, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland for instance, just as the apostles themselves speak of the church that is at Corinth, the church that is at Ephesus, the churches of Asia, &c. The Church of Rome did what it could to prevent such a change, unhappily for its own interests, happily for true religion. The church of Rome, imitating still the principles of the Roman Empire, as it had done from the first, instead of repeating the voice of Christ, and manifesting love, and using persuasion in favour of unity, persevered in the exclusive exercise of authority. But authority, especially in matters of

religion, came with exceedingly bad grace from a court and clergy now become equally arrogant and profligate. And now Europe grows sick of it. Reason and conscience begin to breathe in many breasts. Some feel that it would give a charm and a new life to the principle of obedience, could they but see that the thing commanded was reasonable and right. Others perceive that many things in the church are plainly wrong. Nay, some begin to discover that both church and state will never be on a right basis till they act according to laws known and admitted by those who are called upon to obey. Jurisconsults seeing that the people are weary of living in a state of things where there is no depending on the edicts of the authority, all being personal to the prince and arbitrary, begin to revive publicly the knowledge of civil law, and by making known the immortal works of classic antiquity, long concealed in the cells of the monasteries, they awaken the demand for constitutional liberty. By their side, certain enlightened Christians, made aware of what Christianity really is, by the perusal of the sacred scriptures long retained in the exclusive hands of the sacerdotal order, begin to make known the sad corruptions of the gospel by the Church of Rome. At the same time philosophers, favoured by new lights such as never shone on the world before, begin to reveal the beautiful arrangements and beneficent laws by which the God of nature administers the affairs of that kingdom.

Moreover, this great work, in which jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy unite in awaking a new era, is mightily assisted by the discovery of a new art,—a discovery the most important by far that ever has been made. Books are printed. The many begin to read and reflect. And when this is the case, it is all over with mere authority. And here let me not recall to the reader's mind the disgraceful attempts of the Romish

priesthood to put a stop to the work of general enlightenment, in all that is most delightful and dear to the spirit of man. Let me not recall the tortures, the martyrdoms they inflicted on those who had the best eyes, and who dared to declare what they saw, now that Europe was becoming a valley of vision. Suffice it to say, the reign of the Romish priesthood was over. They could not put out the light, to the exclusive possession of which, among themselves hitherto, they owed their supremacy. "It moves, however," said Galileo, as he rose from his knees,—not from adoring God, though his wisdom appeared in new glory, when it was demonstrated that the sun, not the earth, was the centre of the system,—but from the ignominious attitude in which he received the inflictions of the Church of Rome, for having maintained that glorious truth. "It moves, however," said he; and so it did. The new order of things moved in Europe, in spite of every effort of the Romish priesthood to put a stop to it.

But what we have here chiefly to remark is, that, in the progressive amelioration of all things during this epoch of the revival, the church was reformed. The word of God began to be generally circulated, that all might know His will. And here and there, where the light was brightest, where the spirit of man was freshest, and the shadow of ancient Rome the faintest, evangelical churches arose, formed, as nearly as could be discovered, according to the word of God and the spirit of the primitive churches; and in their creeds based upon that great doctrine, which is at once the essential element of evangelical religion, and of catholicity and Christian feeling, the doctrine of justification by faith. And accordingly, along with deep personal piety, we find, in the leading reformers, a catholicity of spirit, and an advocacy of the cause of catholicity, wonderful for the time

they lived in. Instead of those stringent views of the constitution of the visible church, which insist on conformity to all the requirements of the dominant communion, and which have at all times characterized the Church of Rome, the reformers differ, yet view each other as Christians. They differed too widely, indeed. But what else could be expected from careering intellects like theirs, each bursting forth in its own God-sustained individuality, from the trammels of absolute conformity to error?

It were unreasonable to expect that so great a change as a perfect reformation of the abuses of Rome, could be effected at once, or in a single age. God never in providence, and almost never in grace, gives being to perfection at once. Development is the watchword of His administration. And so it was now. When authority had been the only idea of government for so many centuries, it was not to be expected that the supremacy of the word of God, and the rights of reason and conscience its interpreters, in a word, the doctrine of Christian liberty, should be generally understood and recognised all at once. More especially, since it so happened that the first great reformers were themselves members of the Romish priesthood, it was not to be expected that they could divest themselves altogether of their sacerdotal feelings and education. No wonder if there is still a good deal of intolerance in Luther. No wonder that Calvin maintained that heresy should be punished by the civil magistrate, and winked at, if he did not actually second, the execution of the provoking but unhappy Servetus. It is only those men who are animated, to a certain degree, at least, by the spirit of their times, who can ever either excite or head great movements. In times when a spirit of persecution for religious differences universally prevailed, and was deemed holy, Luther and Calvin

would never have done their business without participating in that spirit. It says much for the Reformation that they should have been so moderate and mild as they were. To expect that there should have been at once all that there ought to have been, is unreasonable. Such maturity in such infancy, had been out of the harmony of things both in providence and grace.

But more may be reasonably expected from us who are alive now. It is now three hundred years since the vineyard was let to us, but are we even yet bringing forth the fruits thereof? These fruits are LOVE, JOY, PEACE, LONG-SUFFERING, GENTLENESS, GOODNESS, FAITH, MEEKNESS, TEMPERANCE.* But what church, or who among us will say that these are our characteristics, or even the objects we aim at? The evangelical churches of the Continent are, indeed, not equally to be charged with fruitlessness, or rather ashes for fruit. Their position in reference to the Church of Rome, which is still dominant there, has enabled them to maintain Christian unity better than us, and has urged them beautifully to mutual recognition and love, so that, in these respects, they are far beyond us. And as the fruit of their love, they enjoy the pleasing reward of numbers being added to them daily, both from the ranks of infidelity and of Romanism. But it is far otherwise here. The Romish priesthood having been subdued in our country, has left us without that pressing motive to unity which has brought into a more kindly brotherhood the evangelical churches abroad, in order the better to resist the great enemy of primitive Christianity. It is also a general fact, that the Christian graces, all of them, tend always to be most conspicuous in the weaker party, especially if it be treated by the stronger in any manner to which the name of persecution can be applied. Now with us, ever since the

* Gal. v. 22.

Reformation, we have been the stronger party. We have had little else to do, in reference to the reformation, but to admire the event, adore God for it, and celebrate the men who were the instruments of achieving our Christian liberty for us. Hence we have very naturally tended to maintain and imitate their spirit, in its faults, as well as in its excellencies. Thinking ourselves safe, when animated by the spirit of that glorious epoch, we have ourselves too often confounded the spirit of the age with the spirit of the Reformation,—too often breathed a spirit of authority, where nought but the voice of Christ, and of patience, and of persuasion, ought to have been heard. Each church affects an authority in reference to others, which it neither has the right nor the power to effectuate. Or if churches, acting in their corporate capacity, do not, yet numberless individual Christians in them do. How many among us are hostile towards each other! And are not almost all suspicious of all but the members of their own communion! Now this cannot last. But whether it is to be brought to an end by merited judgment being inflicted by Popery or Infidelity, or whether a time of refreshing and revival in favour of brotherly love be near at hand, God only knows. Certain it is, however, that our duty is plain. One thing only is needful. Let but unity of spirit, mutual esteem and love, a fraternal feeling between all evangelical churches, and all who love the Lord Jesus, prevail, and all will soon be well,—all will soon be as it ought to be. And the churches of the Reformation, instead of being a byword both to Infidelity and Popery, because of their schisms, will become a praise through the whole earth, and into them will all God-seeking spirits fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows.*

* Isaiah lx. 8.

PART IV.

THE

LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE PRINCIPLES AND PRECEPTS.

THE LAW.
THE PROPHETS.
THE GOSPELS.
THE EPISTLES.
THE WHOLE BIBLE.

SCRIPTURE PRINCIPLES AND PRECEPTS.

Having given a sketch of the light which sacred history throws on the inquiry now before us, let us proceed to consider the subject in the light in which scripture principles and precepts invest it.

Does the word of God then, viewed in its precepts and principles, countenance the opinion that an universal uniformity among all Christian churches is of the essence of Christian unity, and a state of things which should immediately, and at all times, be insisted on and aimed at—or does it not rather harmoniously, with the lessons of sacred history as we have just seen, and with the dictates of reason and conscience as we shall see hereafter, point to an unity in spirit in variety of form, as an unity of a high order in itself, and in no degree uncongenial with the spirit of the gospel; and though not the limit of perfection, yet in the mean time not unsuitable, and better every way than an outward uniformity forced upon all. In other words, which of the two schemes do scripture principles and precepts indicate as the true catholicity in such a state of the Church as now exists, *first*, that of the Church of Rome, the theory of which is to maintain uniformity over all at all costs—uniformity even to the using of the same dead language in worship over the whole world, and the forbidding of all religious inquiry among the faithful (except at the priesthood); or, *second*, that of the Churches of the Reformation, where the rights of the individual conscience

are respected, and the holy pleasures of communion with God in the spontaneous utterance of the heart and religious interchange of thought between the pious, are not denied, for the sake of maintaining an uniformity in the letter; and where, were the principle of the catholic spirit of true religion rightly understood, and were there the charity over all which there ought ever to be, there would also be a beautiful unity in spirit subsisting in variety of forms, embracing all, and making all one in Christ Jesus. Let us inquire which of these two schemes the principles and precepts of Scripture countenance. And, in the first place, what say the writings of Moses?

THE LAW.

In the books of Moses we shall find all the precepts, I believe, which the prevalent taste for universal uniformity can find for its own support in the sacred volume. And let it be granted that such precepts do exist there in abundance. Let it be granted, that in the institutes of Moses there are so many ordinances obviously intended to establish and maintain uniformity in the worship of God, that it is unnecessary to quote them. Although it appears, in point of fact, that the people for whom that dispensation was intended, did not so understand it as to refrain from variations—although it might be shewn that the history of the Jewish Church was after all but a succession of changes, and that some of these at least (the Feast of the Dedication, for instance, of which we read not in the law but in the evangelists, and which our Saviour himself countenanced) were not wrong nor displeasing to God, yet let it be granted that, during the Mosaic economy, the rule was that an universal unifor-

mity ought to exist, still such an admission—such a fact, is no argument in favour of attempting an universal uniformity in the Christian church. It goes no way at all to weaken arguments derived from other sources in favour of an unity in spirit in variety of form, as an organization suitable to the Christian church in the present period. For it is nowhere said in Scripture, nor does it stand to reason, that the rule of the Mosaic dispensation should be applied to the Christian dispensation. There always is, indeed, a strong liking in a good part of the people in every country to perpetuate in all things, and especially in religion, whatever has been once established or has once crept into practice. It is only to be expected, therefore, that the Mosaic system of uniformity once prevailing, it would tend to be perpetuated even after a new economy had been granted to replace it, and however dissimilar the latter might be to it. And, in point of fact, nothing cost the first Christians a greater effort than to emancipate themselves from the regimen of the Mosaic economy, under which they were educated, and which subsisted till then. And on no subject did the first teachers of Christianity bestow more pains than to persuade the Christian converts to avail themselves of the liberty with which Christ had made them free. Nor is this to be wondered at. For here, besides the difficulty (in all cases great) of changing religious habits and ideas formed by education, there was a circumstance which gave a strength to the conservative principle which no other case could supply. The Mosaic economy was immediately instituted by God. And it is not without the semblance of good reason that one may always maintain, as a general principle, that what God has positively ordained in reference to the church, when directly organized by Himself, ought to be perpetuated for ever, or at least regarded as the type of what ought to be imitated by man, when called upon to

do what God once did. In such an argument there is an aspect of piety which commends it in a moment to every mind. It is obvious, however, that there is also a wide door for a fallacy in it. In a word, it is only a general principle, and it applies in any particular case only when that case is analogous to the first. In reference to the two economies now considered as to the question of uniformity, the argument from the Mosaic to the Christian can be applied with propriety, only in so far as these two economies are analogous. Even granting an universal uniformity in the Mosaic economy, and its perfect suitableness to it, nay, its necessity, in order to the preservation of the true religion in the then circumstances of the world; granting, in a word, all that can be conceived in favour of uniformity in reference to the old economy, still the enacting of such a system in reference to that economy, is no argument for its introduction into the new dispensation, unless that new dispensation be analogous to the old, in those respects, at least, which uniformity must affect. If, instead of being analogous to each other, these two dispensations be, on the contrary, rather contrasted in all their outward features and objects, then, although uniformity may have been ordered by God in reference to the one, it were presumptuous rather than pious to use the authority of God as a warrant for attempting to force uniformity upon the other. But why, let me ask, is this argument from analogy needed at all? If it was the design of God that the regimen of the first dispensation should be carried down into the second and perpetuated, surely we shall find this intimated in the word of God, since the great difference between the two economies makes this so questionable in the eye of reason; since the whole economy, where uniformity is enjoined, is replete with positive precepts which such a matter as uniformity neces-

sarily needs in order to establish and maintain it, surely a positive precept is needed, then, when the new dispensation is granted, if the regimen of the old and its uniformity are to be carried down into the new. At such an event as the incarnation, which seems in every respect so complete a winding up of a typical dispensation, what warrant can we have for upholding that economy, and repeating its now unmeaning forms, and insisting on its now superseded ordinances, unless we have a positive command to do so? But, far from this, there is no such precept in the New Testament as that we must perpetuate the old dispensation. All the intimations by our Saviour and the apostles tend the other way. But though it had been otherwise, the very fact of the Divine orders given under the old dispensation being not repeated under the new, calls for the inference that they have served their purpose, and have passed away with the dispensation to which they belonged.

Had the two economies been analogous, the case would indeed have been different; but, as has already been observed, they are much more remarkable for their contrast than their agreement. The Mosaic economy is indeed, as it were, the embryo of the Christian. But in matters external, this very relation argues difference rather than agreement. There is the same life in the embryo, no doubt, as in the full-blown flower. The latter is only the former continued and expanded. But in being thus expanded, it is also completely altered both in form and function. And as with the plant, so with the church this alteration is so great, that the economy which was suitable to the first dispensation or embryo state of the church, may be quite unsuitable to the more mature and expanded form. Thus, as the seed, in order to the preservation of its life as a seed, requires insulation from all surrounding influences, and is, in fact, most wisely

and beautifully organized (often enclosed in a shell, for instance), in order to effect this object, while the plant, on the other hand, requires, in order to its well-being, to be brought into contact with all the surrounding elements, and is wisely and beautifully organized, to enable it to do so;—as the seed is a small compact body, closely enwrapped, while the plant is a body of very varied form, its roots fixed in the earth, and seeking nourishment from the soil all around, and its branches stretching up on all hands into the atmosphere, whence they derive moisture and vital air, and become mingled with all things around,—so the Jewish economy, like the seed, was wholly organized for insulation among the surrounding nations (which was indeed the essential condition of its existence). The Christian economy, on the other hand, is designed for expansion on all hands, so as even to embrace the whole world. This is the ordinance of the passover, said the Lord by Moses, "there shall no stranger eat thereof." But as to the gospel, these were our Saviour's words just before He was received up into heaven, to sit on the right hand of God, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The two dispensations are altogether contrasted in respect of sphere. The Mosaic was intended for *one* nation only. The gospel was intended for being diffused over the whole world. In the Christian economy, we are therefore to expect an organization like that of the plant, that is, an unity in sap and in spirit, but a form changing with its place and calling, as root, branch, or leaf, everywhere varied, in short, so as to be everywhere suitable to its sphere of action.

An absolute unity or uniformity over all, was plainly that constitution which suited best the purposes for which the Mosaic economy was designed. For in the first place, that economy being limited to a single na-

tion, an uniformity over all was attainable in the highest possible degree. In the second place, as that economy had for its object not to unite all the surrounding nations into one fraternity with itself, but rather to insulate and separate the chosen people from all around, in order to an uncontaminated preservation of true religion, till the fulness of the time for the incarnation, the closing up of the whole ecclesiastical constitution into as absolute an unity as possible, was plainly the best means that can be conceived for accomplishing the end proposed. A system of positive ordinances sent down fresh from heaven, was obviously a most effective and divine method of erecting a strong barrier between the chosen people and the surrounding nations, whose rituals were already organized, according to the traditions and inventions of a dark and cruel superstition. The plan which was taken, therefore, was the fittest and the wisest that can be conceived to enable the chosen people to fulfil their calling. The command, that all the ordinances of the law should be observed by every worshipper, according to an unity in form, place, and time, was the very system required, in order to make an economy whose chief end was insulation, as complete as the elements of human nature admit of, and therefore viewed in relation to its objects, such an economy is worthy of our highest admiration. Had the rites and practices of the religion of the Jews been left free, had a variety of form, limited only by the unity of the faith, and the suggestions of the reason and conscience of the worshippers being permitted, the Jewish people could not have fulfilled its calling as God's peculiar people. In that case, that people, thinking, and feeling, and acting, like all other people, under the influence of a social and imitative nature, would soon have merged into the surrounding nations, and consequently would soon have lost, along with them, the knowledge

and the worship of the true God, and would soon have indulged along with them in all the unholy acts of an abominable idolatry.

But in all respects, the Christian economy is wholly different from the Jewish. It is the leaven which is to leaven the whole world with its own blessed spirit. It is the great tree of which the other is but the seed; and instead of being hedged round and forbid, like the other, all the birds of heaven are invited and destined to come and build their nests among its branches. It is the child ever growing in stature, and in favour with God and man, which is called to cultivate the world, and of which the other was but the womb in the east. Instead of having to conceal and wrap up the truth for a time, like the Mosaic economy, the gospel is designed to be the pillar and support of the truth for ever. Instead of being required to insulate one nation among those which lie around, it is designed to ramify and flow through all nations, to diffuse its spirit over them all, and unite them all into one enlightened fraternity. Both as to extent and function, therefore, the Christian economy is quite the reverse of the Mosaic. The argument from the one to the other, therefore, in every question touching ritual and polity, is rather an argument of contrast than of analogy. And an absolute unity or uniformity over all, though at once possible, desirable, and actual, in reference to the Mosaic economy, may be altogether contrary to the design of God, and both unsuitable and impossible in reference to the Christian, at least until that time come, when, by the general diffusion of truth, and the general dominion of love, the whole world becomes as one nation. To argue, therefore, from the Jewish economy to the Christian in favour of an absolute unity in the church in reference to the present times, is to argue in the face of every urgent reason, which Scrip-

ture supplies. It is nothing less than to maintain that, because God instituted for the peculiar circumstances of a peculiar people a peculiar state of things designed by Him (as we know from His own word) to exist for a limited time only, and to serve during that limited time an obviously valuable purpose, therefore, that peculiar system should be kept up after that time has elapsed, and the economy which belonged to it has passed away, and been replaced by another of a higher order.

Yet let us not wonder that a strong prepossession in favour of positive precepts, limiting all to universal uniformity everywhere, should still prevail. It has been stated how difficult the apostles found it, even in an age of inspiration and of miraculous gifts, to prevent the first Christians from modelling the Christian upon the Jewish economy. It has been shewn how difficult they found it to establish the doctrine of Christian liberty. And when we consider how little pains are now taken even by pious persons, to obtain a sound and connected view of revelation; and that with many readers of the Bible, neither time, nor place, nor manners, nor any principle of just interpretation, is attended to; but, on the contrary, that that fictitious unity called a verse, provided only it be found anywhere in the Bible, is considered equally relevant to any question, it is not to be wondered at, if the practice of Judaizing be still continued by many. It is only what is to be expected, if the ancient prejudice in favour of an universal uniformity in religion still haunt the minds of many, especially among those who make use of the Bible merely to support their religious feelings not to form them; as ever tends to be the case with almost all who owe their religion to a naturally devotional temperament merely. Let not these remarks, however, lead the reader to undervalue the writings of Moses in reference to the question which now

engages us. The Pentateuch is in reference to the question of Christian unity, as in reference to every other question in true religion of inestimable value. But in order to its right use, it must be studied and viewed in the greater light in which our Saviour and the apostles invest it. It must not be rapidly turned over, and a verse here, a verse there, fixed on to serve a purpose. It must be studied.

If it be asked how it ought to be studied, in order to extract from it the true idea of Christian unity, it is to be answered, that plainly we are not to look for the unity which the church universal ought to possess, by directing our regards exclusively to the circumstances of the Jews subsequently to the birth of Moses. On the contrary, we ought plainly to look to the constitution of the church, in the whole display that Moses gives of it, that is, from the fall till the time of the Judges. This done, however, the results obtained are evidently not to be lightly esteemed. Nay, they may, on the other hand, be safely regarded as a specimen of what the church of Christ, viewed as a whole, ought to display, or at least may display, without ceasing to be one church. For in that successive picture, or revolving panorama, which opens with the view of our first parents, not yet expelled from paradise, but listening to the promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, and which closes with the view of Moses dying on Mount Pisgah, we have, in a successive series, an exhibition of the church, as constituted, in various states of society, various developments of human nature, such as, when taken together and viewed simultaneously, give a very good representation of the human family, as constituted at any one time in different regions of the world now. We have, therefore, only to conceive the successive peoples who constituted and represented the church on earth during the

epoch which the books of Moses embrace, as all alive at once, or present before the mind at once; and we have a variety of races and peoples analogous to that which exists at any one time on the face of the earth, and consequently, analogous to such a community as Christianity is designed for. And, in these circumstances, it is a legitimate inference, that the church, in both epochs, may be expected to display the same order and amount of unity, in all that relates to the practice of true religion. Now, looking to the unity which the church displayed during the primitive epoch referred to, the epoch which embraces Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, in a word, the whole progress of man from the rural patriarchal state, to the city and the theocratic republic, it will be found that it is widely different from an absolute unity. It will be found that its articles at one time were extremely few, at another more numerous, —that its worship was at one time extremely simple and unpretending, at another extremely complicated and magnificent. It will also be found that its polity displayed the same variety; in a word, that its entire constitution was changed from time to time, and progressively developed, so that it might be always co-ordinate with the spiritual wants of the people who lived successively. But, however varied, it may always be easily discovered, also, that it ever manifested the spiritual unity of true religion. Since it varied in every external, however, its unity was an unity of spirit in variety of forms and developments. And thus the argument from the books of Moses, so far as it is good, goes all the way to prove that a varied unity is an unity not unsuitable for the true religion and such as God may be expected to permit and to use in the Christian church.

It is also well worthy of remark, that the portion of the church's history, which we have just been reviewing,

supplies us with certain types or representatives of the church, such as the cherubim and the ark of Noah, which serve well to illustrate the truth which has just been made out; and which, while they shew the unity of the church, illustrate no less significantly the variety of forms in which that unity may be clothed. With regard to the ark of Noah, nothing need be said, since, in point of variety, it was an epitome of the whole creation, and with respect to the cherubim, the argument thence has been sufficiently dwelt upon already. Let it therefore be only remarked further, how harmonious is the whole evidence during the pentateuchal epoch, in favour of the thesis, which it is our object to commend to the pious reader.

THE PROPHETS.

Having thus considered the argument derived from the Mosaic scriptures, let us now prepare the way for the New Testament, by considering what intimations the prophets give on the subject of Christian unity. Of the inspired utterance of the prophets, it may indeed be alleged that they generally admit of a too great latitude of interpretation, to be of any great use in an inquiry like the present. It may also be alleged that they were plainly never intended for it. And, indeed, it must be admitted, that most frequently they refer exclusively to the futurity of that nation merely to which the prophets themselves belonged, and consequently, are not always relevant to the church universal, which embraces Gentiles as well as Jews. Nevertheless, prophecy has a certain weight in the argument before us, and ought not to be passed over. What, then, is its testimony? A few words will be sufficient to shew, that, so far as it goes, prophecy indicates that the unity of the Christian church, for many ages at least, shall be found to be of that kind which has

been deduced in the preceding paragraph from the Mosaic writings,—namely, not an universal uniformity or absolute sameness over all, but an unity of spirit in variety of form and manifestation.

Even in reference to the futurity of the single race which they themselves belonged to, the prophets, how glowing soever the representation they give of the future destinies of their nation, never picture as desirable any such consummation as the loss by each tribe of its own name and characteristics, and the merging of all variety into universal uniformity. They intimate only the vanishing of the angry passions, from before that spirit of harmony and love, which should unite all into one under the Messiah.

They do not say that Judah will merge into Ephraim, and Ephraim into Judah. But, says Isaiah,

> The jealousy of Ephraim shall cease,
> And the enmity of Judah shall be no more;
> Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah,
> And Judah shall not be at enmity with Ephraim.*

Again. Ezekiel,† seemingly referring to the same times, says, "Take to thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions, and join them one to another into one stick, and they shall become one in thine hand;" in which words, it is to be observed, that all are not to be written on the same stick, but each on its own, and then the peculiar sticks of each tribe to be united into one.

But not to enter more minutely on such investigations, against the validity of which to our present argument many objections may be urged, and which are, after all, irrelevant to our present purpose, since they relate to

* Isaiah xi. 13. Lowth. † Ezekiel xxxvii. 16.

the destiny of a single nation only, not to the church universal, let us turn at once to the justly celebrated and inimitably beautiful passage in Isaiah, which may be taken as the epitome and representative of all that the prophets have uttered as to the unity of the church under the reign of the Messiah. It is in the eleventh chapter. There he says,—

Then shall the wolf take up his abode with the lamb,
And the leopard lie down with the kid;
And the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling shall come together;
And a little child shall lead them.
Together shall their young ones lie down;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
And the suckling shall play on the hole of the asp,
And on the den of the basilisk shall the new wean'd child lay his hand.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Jehovah,
And the waters that cover the depths of the sea.
And it shall come to pass in that day,
The root of Jesse, which standeth for an ensign to the people;
Unto him shall the nations repair,
And his resting-place shall be glorious.

Now, here we have a description of unity such as none surely can refrain from admiring, none refrain from longing for. But wherein, after all, does that unity consist? What makes the resting-place of the Redeemer glorious? Is it a sameness and uniformity everywhere, and over all? In what respect does the prophet represent the people as one? First; they are one, in that they all repair to the Messiah, who stands as an ensign for all. Secondly; they are one in that, however savage by nature, being now transfigured by grace into harmlessness and love, they live together in mutual concord and peace, so that there is nothing to hurt or to destroy over all the holy mountain, over all the church. Such is the harmony, such the unity, which reigns universally! But such also are the limits of the church's unity, at least such are the

limits here pictured by the evangelical prophet. Christian unity is here represented as existing amid all the original variety of the creation itself. And does not even all the beauty of the description depend on this very variety? Let the reader but contemplate for a moment the scenery which the prophet places before the eye, he will not fail to discover that this is the fact. He will find that the lion, the leopard, the basilisk, contribute each its own share to the beauty of the scene, as well as the lamb and the little child. The beautiful and the heavenly thing is to see all the various creatures lying down together, dwelling together, playing together, all fierceness away from the powerful, all fear away from the feeble; and all in richly varied harmony of form and endowment, breathing together, in mutual confidence and repose, on the holy mountain, while it glows under the peaceful and love-inspiring beams of the Sun of Righteousness.

And is not such variety of form and endowment, when thus embraced by such perfect unity in spirit, truly beautiful, and fit for the glorious resting-place of Him who is himself at one time represented as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, at another as the Lamb of God, and at another as *slaying* the wicked with the *breath* of his lips?* How changed the scene, if, instead of this beauteous variety, displaying, in manifold shapes and endowments, all the riches of life reposing on the varying acclivities of a mountain, there were on all hands, and over all, on a level plain, nothing but one form, one species only, say even the sweetest and the best, say at once, a flock of lambs on a meadow! How dull, inglorious, and effeminate, such uniformity! It would never do for Isaiah.

So far, then, as this description of the evangelical prophet is applicable to our present inquiry, it does not lead us to expect more in the Christian Church than an

* Isaiah xi. 4.

unity of spirit in variety of form and endowment. It is even opposed to the idea, that an absolute unity or uniformity over all would be more beautiful. To these remarks we might add such illustrations as the Psalms afford. Nor are they few. More especially, in the 48th Psalm, the church is compared to Jerusalem in all its variety of bulwarks, palaces, and towers. And to this we might subjoin a description of the bride's attire in the Song of Solomon, in which her glory and beauty is in like manner chiefly laid in the variety of her ornaments. In a word, all these passages point equally to a state of things in which, along with unity of spirit, there is great variety of form. But let these remarks suffice on the poetic books. Turn we now to the New Testament.

Yet may we not touch the New ere we part with the Old, by calling to the reader's remembrance the vision of Peter, so similar in many respects to the above description of Isaiah, the vision whereby he was instructed in the first great principle of Catholicity, to which, along with his countrymen in general, he was, till then, too much a stranger? The time was now come when it became the duty and the privilege of this apostle to begin the great work of "binding and loosing," binding to the moral law, loosing from the ceremonial, which all the apostles afterwards, but he alone in the first instance, was charged with. Cornelius, the reputedly unclean Gentile, must be visited; and the apostle must be prepared for this act, deemed by his countrymen, and till now by himself also, to indicate a great dereliction of religious principle. Accordingly, for the purpose of enlightening him, a vision was given to him, which is thus related in the Acts of the Apostles.* "On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the house-top to pray about the

* Acts x. 9.

sixth hour. And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but, while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth; wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call thou not common. This was done thrice; and the vessel was received up again into heaven." Such was the vision, and the apostle speedily understood it; and, when he met Cornelius, he thus expressed the lesson he had been taught by it: "Ye know how it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company or to come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

Now, from this narrative it appears, that the great sheet, with all the life in it, which St Peter saw, represented the Christian Church. From this passage of holy scripture, therefore, similarly to that pictured by Isaiah on the holy mountain, we learn that the church, in so far as it is represented by these images, consists in great variety of forms in unity of spirit only. In both there is an unity—that of love in the vision of Isaiah, that of purity in the vision of Peter. But, along with this, there is a variety so great, that in both cases the church is represented by the whole variety of the creation. Ought we not, then, during the present epoch to which these scriptures and our duties apply,—the epoch intermediate between the first and the second coming of our Saviour,—consent to such a state of things?

THE EVANGELISTS.

The peculiar characteristics of our Saviour's preaching are a spirit of all-pervading piety, all-embracing benevolence, and uncompromising holiness. These graces He breathes in his every utterance, and commends in His every discourse. Many a precept does He give, enjoining and illustrating them. And His own love to the world, nay, His own life does He give, not only as an atonement for the sins of the world, but also as a pattern of that mutual love and self-denial which ought to animate the redeemed children of God. "A new commandment (says He) I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."*

Nor let us wonder that He should call this a new commandment. For, not to speak of the supreme excellence of that love of His which He gives as the type and pattern of that which He commends, it is to be remarked, that the whole doctrine of love which He taught was new in those times. The Pharisees, with a semblance of reason indeed, but, in reality, prompted only by their own exclusive and wicked hearts, generalizing the facts and necessities of their nation's history into permanent principles of morality, had altogether obscured the benevolent character of the law of Moses. They had even made it of none effect by their traditions. Thus, because they found their forefathers commanded to exterminate certain idolatrous nations, in order to make place in the fit region of the earth† for a people who might preserve the worship of the true God until the world should be ready for the Incarnation of the Son of God—because they thus found the heroic spirit of man made use of as a weapon of God, in order to serve a mighty purpose which a heroic

* John xiii. 34. † See page 168.

spirit could alone effect, they seized on this fact as a cover and sanction for the spirit of hatred and vengeance which animated them. By a vicious generalization, they consecrated that spirit, and made it a general principle in religion, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." * Nay, not content with the wide field for hatred which the latter part of the precept opens up, they narrowed the former most shamefully. To the term neighbour they gave so restricted a sense, that they looked upon, as their greatest enemies, those whom we should call their nearest neighbours. These were the Samaritans. And to such a pitch did a Jew carry his hatred of a Samaritan, that he would not even ask a drink of water from him.† But their antipathies were not confined to the Samaritans only. It was, as has been already stated, held contrary to the law (a law which a Jew's natural pride would plainly render very congenial to him to observe) to have any social intercourse with any man of another nation. In a word, the Jews were hateful, and hating one another; and this was over all. And, but that the love of money overcomes all difficulties, we should find the same spirit in that people still. Let any one enter a synagogue, and attempt to look on the same prayer book with one of the worshippers, the Jew will shrink or steal away from him, eyeing him askance with a look full of hatred and contempt. So ruinous, even to the ordinary principles of humanity, does a conceit of exclusive religious privilege prove when redeeming grace is wanting in the heart.

But do we see any trace of any thing like this in Jesus? Nay. In His every feature the contrast which He displays to this, though it was the all-pervading spirit of His age and nation, is itself a most convincing proof of His divinity. For as to the merely great men of history

* Matt. v. 43. † John iv. 9.

they are just made by their times,—they are just the spirits of their times. They are acknowledged to be great only because they unite many voices in their own, and thus are oracles by which the many speak, and by whom, therefore, the many are pleased and flattered, as every one is by an echo of his own opinions. But it was quite otherwise with our Saviour. Because it became Him to fulfil all righteousness, He did indeed observe the law of Moses, and during all His life He gave a perfect example of what a son of Abraham ought to be. But He never identified himself with the Jews of his own times. On the other hand, He speaks of them as a race wholly distinct from himself, and having no sympathies with Him. "Am I a Jew?" said Pilate; "Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done?" Pilate looks on Him merely as a Jew. But our Saviour answers, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to *the Jews*." In which words He contrasts himself with His countrymen according to the flesh, as He did with his relations according to the flesh, when he said, "Whosoever doeth the will of My Father who is in heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." He stands out both from country and kindred. He stands alone. He is the Son of God. The character of our blessed Saviour never could be explained by supposing Him to be merely a great man. No mere man could ever emancipate himself so completely as He did from the spirit of His times. He existed and he preached in direct contradistinction to that spirit and those times. In the midst of hardheartedness and hatred, "A root in a dry soil, He grew up a tender plant." Though forced to breathe an impure atmosphere of hatred and hypocrisy during all His life, still He remained altogether uncontaminated by it; and

every feeling that ever moved in His heart, every truth that ever flowed from His lips, was full of heaven and of humanity.

How cuttingly to the heart of the wicked lawyer who stood up and tempted Him, and to us how beautifully and convincingly does He restore to the term *neighbour* its legitimate import, by the parable of the Good Samaritan! And how completely does He annul the false generalization of the Pharisees, who maintained that, because their fathers were forbid to give peace to the enemies of Jehovah,* therefore they were to hate all who were their own enemies. "Ye have heard (says He) that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father who is in heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."† But it is needless to attempt to quote what our blessed Saviour has said in favour of reciprocal kind offices between man and man, and mutual love among all. This were to write down the whole gospels. Nay, though this were done, it were not all the truth. For the Evangelist tells us, that all that is recorded is but a tithe and scantling of what Jesus actually said and did.

True, He also cautioned his disciples very solemnly against supposing that they were to enjoy, in their personal history, the love and peace which He inculcated. He taught them that they were only to be the ministers of that peace, not the partakers of it. He knew that the spirit of the world, always heroic in persecuting piety, would feel a sting in the very glance of these advocates

* Deut. xxiii. 6. † Matt. v. 43.

of love and peace; and for the hatred against them which that feeling would beget, He prepares His disciples. "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.* . . . Beware of men. . . . The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child, and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. . . . . Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I am not come to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's foes shall be those of his own household." Such, did He warn His disciples, were to be the inevitable consequences of confessing His name, and of adhering to the doctrine of the cross, in the midst of a cruel, proud, and persecuting world. And so it happened. It is, indeed, truly worthy of remark, that though, in religion, the policy of Rome was to grant toleration to all, though, in civil law, none were punished by Rome but when a crime was proved against them, yet it went quite otherwise in Rome with the followers of Jesus. If they but confessed the name of Christ, that was enough to bring them to the rack, to the arena. Literally, as our Saviour forewarned them, they were persecuted solely "for his name's sake." And truly dreadful were the sufferings which were inflicted on them.

Yet the sufferings of the first Christians were not unmitigated evils. On the contrary, as it is only through death that we attain to life, and as it is the peculiar characteristic of Divine Providence to bring good out of evil, so was it only by martyrdom that the peaceful spirit of the gospel could be preached effectually to the Roman. Reason went but a little way with him. In the Roman

* Matt. x. 16.

language the word for virtue and for valour is the same. A martyrdom, therefore, a scene of heroism, was the argument which told best in Rome. And when the Roman saw the Christian expiring, wrapt in a peaceful devotion which no tortures could subdue or even disturb, he was forced to conclude that there must be something truly divine in that religion, which could inspirit the believers in it to endure such tortures and such deaths rather than abjure it—that religion which could support men in such tranquillity in the midst of such excruciating torments.

Nor was it at that period of the history of the Church only, that martyrdom had fruits unto righteousness. All after ages have reaped them, and there is need for gathering them still. For as there are not a few principles and practices which can neither be proved to the satisfaction of all nor yet disproved, neither by reason nor revelation nor by both conjoined, but only by making the moral experiment and marking the result, so has it only been by inflicting persecution for religious differences, and by noting the result, that the rightness of liberty of conscience has at last been proved. Nay, it is still needful to look to the same source of evidence, in order to prevent religious persecution. For, wherever there is an exclusive spirit, there is one who will not want arguments in favour of persecution on account of religious differences. And, doubtless, in the future, just as in the past, certain men, animated by zeal without knowledge, will ever feel the desire to put down religious differences by force. The history of preceding persecutions, therefore, is still valuable; for they all unite in shewing, that, except when persecution is carried to the utter extermination of the obnoxious party, to persecute even error is only to perpetuate it. And no wonder. Persecution places a man into the attitude of a hero; and hence, when arguments might soon have failed him, persecution gives him a new

opportunity of shewing by his deeds how sincerely he believes and will defend his opinions. Besides, after having been proved to be a bad theologian, one feels that it is some consolation to have an opportunity of shewing that he is a brave man. Nor is it his bravery only that a man proves when he suffers for his faith. Even as to the argument, he who dies in the cause has always the last word that is listened to.

But it is not generalities only that we find in the gospels on the subject of Christian harmony. Our Saviour has given from His own lips a most important deliverance on the subject of Christian unity. He uttered it only a few hours before He was betrayed, and it is full of the solemnity of that dreadful night. It forms a part of that divine prayer which He breathed in the hearing of his disciples, after He had instituted the sacrament of the Supper, and before He fell into His agony in the garden. In that memorable prayer, our Lord's leading petition for His disciples, is that they may be one. "Holy Father (says He), keep through (or in) Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are."* And this petition for His immediate disciples, He afterwards extends so as to embrace all future believers. "Neither pray I (continues He) for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me." Now, after these words from our Saviour's own lips, there is certainly no room even for a moment's doubt, that it is His will and desire that all Christians should be intimately one.

But, from these words, it is equally certain that the unity among His disciples, for which our Saviour prays, is wholly of a spiritual nature, and, in point of fact, does

* John xvii. 11.

not depend on external forms or ecclesiastical circumstances at all. And were we to extend His words, so as to apply them to external matters, we should be no more led to the idea of universal uniformity, than we have been by considering the intimations of Christian unity given by the prophets. Thus the instance which our Saviour gives as the type of Christian unity, is that which exists between his Father and Himself, that is, the unity which subsists between the Infinite, who is eternally the same invisible, formless, all-pervading spirit, and the Immanuel, who, though truly one with the Invisible, is also God with us, is man as well as God, possesses, in one aspect, the form and being of a man, as well as in another aspect, the formlessness and eternity of God. But the form of man is visible and limited, and essentially dissimilar to pure spirit. It is also ever varying in itself, changing from infancy to childhood, from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to age, in a word, from day to day, from hour to hour. So that, in the instance which our Saviour gives as the type of that unity which He prays for among His followers, we have an unity which, far from being an absolute uniformity, is an unity in spirit, a spiritual unity in striking difference and variety of manifestation and form.

But care ought ever to be taken in the interpretation of Scripture, not to draw more from its language than it appears, in the eye of a sober mind, to have been designed to convey. Let the reader, therefore, attach what value he pleases to the preceding remarks; about this there is no room for doubt, that the grand doctrine which our Saviour teaches in this passage of Scripture, is the truly spiritual nature of Christian unity. "I pray, (says He) that they may be one in us." Hence it appears that the essence of Christian unity, the mechanism,

so to speak, by which Christian unity is established and maintained, is, in point of fact, not any stated agreement among Christians themselves as to creed, ritual, polity, &c., but altogether of a spiritual nature, a tie to the Father and the Son, through the Son. For any thing that is here affirmed to the contrary, it may indeed be most desirable that Christians should be at one in all the outward particulars of ritual and ecclesiastical constitution; but though they were, that outward agreement would not constitute the ground and tie of their unity. The ground and tie of Christian unity, according to this Scripture, is not one of words between man and man. It is a holier and more divine and immutable tie,—a tie of spirit and of life, proceeding from Christ, and spiritually and virtually uniting all to him, and through him to one another, as branches are united to and in the vine, as the body is united to the head.

And from this view, a very important fact results. For hence it follows, that though unhappily Christians should differ among themselves, and even go so far as to excommunicate each other, still, unless by so doing, they can destroy each other's Christianity (and nothing goes farther than schism to do so), they cannot destroy the true unity of the Church. "If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the ear should say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body?" *

The same truly spiritual view is further stated by our Saviour, when He adds, at the 22d verse,—"The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one, I in them, and Thou in me, that they also may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that Thou hast

* 1 Cor. xii. 15.

sent me, and hast loved them as thou hast loved me." Now, whatever view we adopt as to the exact meaning of the term "glory" here used, these additional words of our Saviour do only and at once unite with those of the previous part of this prayer, in illustrating the view of Christian unity which has just been given. They equally imply the fact, that the true, or so to speak, the physical tie between Christians, is wholly of a heavenly and spiritual nature, and neither lies between Christian and Christian, in a direct line, nor depends on any influences or views reciprocating between Christian and Christian, but has its source in influences originating in the Godhead, and thence emanating and spreading, so as to yield a ray to each Christian, and thus to unite the whole church into one on earth, by its being one in heaven. Here is a gift named "glory," which the Son received from the Father, and that He confers on believers, that they may be one, even as the Father and the Son are one, the Son in them, and the Father in the Son, that they also may be made perfect in one: in which words does not our Saviour represent the economy of the church, as consisting, as it were, in three estates, the Father, the Mediator, the society of believers, the tie by which this economy subsists, and by which unity is imparted to it, being an emanation of spiritual influence and privilege here termed "glory," descending from the Father to the Son, and from Him to believers? And are we not called upon by this scripture, to affirm that Christians are made perfect in one, where they are united to God, through the Mediator? And are we not, therefore, led hence to conclude, that, however strong the resemblances between them in ritual and polity, and all externals, still such agreement could never form the true tie of Christian union; nor could any differences, in these particulars, however considerable, break the tie between Christian

and Christian, or destroy their Christian unity, unless these differences destroyed the Christianity of those who differed? In spite of any unhappy variations which may divide them for a time, and wrong them, still all who are regenerated are Christian brethren, and cannot cease to be so. It is birth that makes Christian brotherhood, and it is an indestructible tie.

The view now insisted on is also (unconsciously, as it were) embodied by our evangelist, in one of his epistles, where he says, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."* From these words we learn that the spring of Christian fellowship is divine influence, and that the way to cherish it is, not to compare notes among ourselves, as to where we differ, and where we agree, but to cherish divine contemplation. And, in point of fact, union among men, when arising from mere resemblances, whether merely external or more purely intellectual, is, after all, mere mutual flattery, or rather self-flattery reflected. If mutual resemblance be all the basis of union between Christian and Christian, that union wants the element of Christian life, and in vain are the fruits of righteousness and the charities of the gospel to be expected from it. It may look well while the sun shines, and all goes harmoniously among those who are thus agreed. But only let them cross each other, you find it was but party spirit that animated them, and be prepared for a storm of malignant emotion reciprocating between them.

Were we to seek in the context for the external and practical conditions that are necessary to the existence of this Christian unity, which engaged so much of our Saviour's mind in the solemn moments, when He uttered

* 1 John i. 3.

the prayer recorded in St John's Gospel, we should be led to infer that they stood, not in any thing like a mere uniformity or agreement among believers, in all externals, but in these spiritual and vital considerations, *first*, the keeping of Christians through, or in the name of the Holy Father; and, *secondly*, their "sanctification," or more explicitly, "the keeping of them from the evil that is in the world." And were we to seek for the religious knowledge implied in their being thus kept, we should find it in these words declared by our Lord to be the essentials to eternal life, "the knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ, whom He hath sent." "Holy Father (says He), keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are one." "I pray not that Thou wouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou wouldest keep them from the evil. Sanctify them by Thy truth: Thy word is truth."

Nor is it wonderful that these points should have been singled out for peculiar emphasis at this solemn moment by the prophetic Spirit of our Lord; for, while the faithful few have been kept in the name of the Holy Father, and sanctified or "separated from the evil of the world," and have testified all along that this is eternal life to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, history teaches, that the first great lapse of the rulers of the church consisted in this, that they just reversed this very petition of our Saviour. Instead of sanctifying the church, or keeping it separate from the evil things of the world, they tried to sanctify these evil things for the use of the church, as if a ceremony of exorcising or purgation, or a change of name, could consecrate an object of idol worship, and render it fit for the Christian service. Yet so it was, even in the early centuries of the Christian era, and so it unhappily still is over a large portion of christendom; for reformation, difficult in

all things, is most especially difficult in the church, which not only engages, in favour of things as they have been and are, all the sweet and sacred reminiscences of the young heart's devotion, but all those sentiments of our nature which relate most to eternity, and which are consequently most opposed to mutation and change. But while our Saviour's words imply and enjoin in the church a sanctification and separation from the evil that is in the world, they prescribe no limits to the union and communion of those "who are his sheep and hear his voice,"* who are all agreed in seeking to be sanctified through the word of God, all endeavouring to obtain eternal life through the knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom He had sent.

To the passage in our Saviour's prayer on the unity of the church now considered, may be added another, occurring a few verses before in the narrative of the same evangelist, and expressed in these terms: "Other sheep have I (says our Lord) which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." In these words, as is agreed by all, our Saviour intimates the calling and reception of the Gentiles to be his people along with the Jews, and the union of the whole into one fold. Now here, with regard to the principle of unity, it is to be remarked, that it is still the same as in the passages which have been already considered. This passage is indeed quite parallel to the other in all its details. In the former case, the principle of unity was shewn to lie in the relation of believers to Christ; and in this, in like manner, the oneness of the fold lies in their being under one shepherd. In the former case, Christian unity was to be maintained by "God keeping believers." In this it is to be established by "God bringing in believers." In the

* John x. 27.

former case, the spiritual well-being of all depended on their "having the knowledge of the true God, and of Jesus Christ whom He had sent." In this it depends on "their hearing the voice of the Son of God," a voice which had that knowledge for its constant guide, and God himself for its constant theme. These two passages from the Gospel, therefore, are perfectly parallel to one another, and both have the same tendency as those which have been adduced from the prophets. All unite in resting Christian unity, not in any such mutable considerations as outward agreement, whether uniformity or concord as to ritual, polity, or the like, but in the vital and essential fact of union to God through Christ, and thus through the Godhead to one another.

It may here be remarked, however, that though the true principle of unity thus appears to be wholly spiritual, and consequently invisible in its very nature, yet it is calculated to produce, and does in point of fact always produce, many points of outward agreement among all Christians. Thus all "being regenerated by the same uncorruptible seed,"* bring forth the fruits of righteousness "some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred fold."† The grace of God which bringeth salvation, hath taught them all, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, they "should live soberly, righteously, and piously in this present world, looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for them that he might redeem them from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."‡ Nor are they taught to agree in acting only, but also in believing. And, indeed, it is delightful to contemplate how nearly unanimous all true Christians are about all the essentials of the Christian faith. But this does not fall to be illus-

* 1 Peter i. 23. † Matt. xiii. 8. ‡ Titus ii. 11.

trated here. What we are here bent on shewing is, that however numerous the features of outward language or behaviour in which all Christians do agree, it is not these outward circumstances which constitute the true tie—the true bond of their unity. It is something that has more life in it than either words or deeds, something that admits of special adaptation to the wants of every soul more than either. The words which Christ speaks to the soul that is united to him, are not mere phrases of human language, "but they are spirit and they are life." * And though the sameness of the sap that circulates through all the vine causes a general resemblance in the foliage and fruit of all the branches, yet it is the sap not the similarity that constitutes and maintains the unity. And when this sap ceases to influence and animate any member of the visible church, he ceases, from that very fact, to belong to the true unity of the Church, though he may still remain in external connexion with it.

Upon the whole, then, we learn from the divine aspirations of our blessed Saviour in this His prayer which we have been considering, that all Christians are intimately one with their Saviour, and through Him one with one another. Into however many individual congregations or churches those who hold the evangelical faith and follow after a holy life may be parted, they cannot cease to be truly one till they cease to be Christians. The chasms which time, place, or feeling may open up between them, however vast they may seem to be, cannot break the tie which unites them into one; for that tie does not lie between Christian and Christian; nor does it admit of being broken by their adverse pulling. It lies between every individual believer and the Redeemer, and in Him, and in Him alone, do Christians all really meet in one. Hence the jarrings and antagonisms which reciprocate between

* John vi. 63.

Christian and Christian, cannot hurt the true unity of the Church, except in so far as they weaken and darken those rays of life which, flowing from the Son of God, animate and lighten the soul, and through which all are united to Him, and through Him to one another. It is only in so far as they hurt the Christianity of those who engage in them, that they hurt the unity of the Church. But this they do more than could be told. For if the essential condition of Christianity be the possession of the spirit of Christ, if those who have not the spirit of Christ be none of His,* there is but little room among his disciples for the contentious, to whom, instead of salvation, the apostle Paul assures us, that God will recompense tribulation and wrath.†

But, even when matters do not go so far as the destruction of the Christianity of those who engage in religious dispute with one another, such dispute, though it cannot destroy the real, destroys the visible unity among Christians. And hence a great evil. For mutual love, in that case, being manifestly wanting, the church is self-condemned in the eyes of the world. Infidelity is armed with weapons of fearful moral energy. In that case, infidelity can rail, not without reason and Scripture too on its side, against every pretension to a holy zeal on the part of those, whose most forward features are a schismatic antipathy to all but their own party. Oh, how it must grieve the spirit of the God of love when He looks down upon His church and sees it lacerated, as it is now, by party zeal! Again, and again in this single prayer we have been considering, does our blessed Saviour raise His hands (in a few hours to be stretched on the cross) praying for the unity of His disciples, assigning as the reason of His holy importunity, that when they were seen to be thus united, the world would know and acknowledge that their Master was the Son of the God of love. And is it

* Rom. viii. 9. † Rom. ii. 8.

thus that we requite His solicitude! Is it thus that we answer to His prayer! Oh! is it the mind of Christ that we are embracing, or a holy life that we are seeking, when we are wrangling about every tittle? Whence have we gathered, that our calling as Christians is to be zealous each more than another in plaiting sectarian crowns of thorns to thrust upon the bleeding brows of our Redeemer? If it be the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ that we are contending for, and striving to be fruitful in, that is good. To know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent, is eternal life. But how do we become fruitful in such knowledge? If we are to believe inspiration, it is by "adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity." He that lacketh these things we are assured is blind. Ah! how many among us are blind. Would that this long night of strife were spent! Would that the day were at hand when every Christian will put on the armour of light,—"GODLINESS, BROTHERLY KINDNESS, CHARITY!"

If that day do not come speedily, it looks all as if a dark dark night would soon be over the evangelical churches of Britain. It looks as if God were preparing a judgment to shew, in a way that cannot be misunderstood, that love really is, as our Saviour positively declared it to be, the peculiar characteristic of Christianity, and that this grace, though many shortcomings therewith, is better than more truth with strife. As is always the case with a party who are denied privileges, which they cannot be persuaded that they have no right to enjoy, the members of the Church of Rome, in this kingdom, have been long, and still are, animated (in painful contrast with those of the churches of the Reformation), by such a spirit of fraternal regard, that they form a strongly united communion. And does it not look as if, in reward,

they had now a mission to chastise, to purge the Lord's vineyard, which, though it has now for nearly three hundred years been growing in a bright light of truth to which Romanists are strangers, is yet bringing forth to such a fearful extent wild grapes only? But let the reader think rather than the writer speak on such a subject. The present only is ours. "It is not for us to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power."* But we have duties. Let us not forget them, nor Him who calls us to them.

THE APOSTLES.

The apostles, guided by that Spirit which "taught them all things," were too enlightened not to know that party spirit and sectarian zeal, which had ever shewn themselves leading principles in human nature under every form of religion, would soon manifest themselves in the Church of Christ, as well as every where else. In almost every one of the apostolic epistles, therefore, there are to be found passages emphatically enjoining unity in that church to which the epistle is addressed, and cautioning the Christian converts against schism. In almost every apostolic epistle, therefore, there is some passage or other relating to the inquiry which now engages us. And this part of our investigation naturally leads us to a variety of details.

There is one respect, however, in which all these passages are at one; and it is important for us to remark, in the first place, this feature of universal agreement amongst them; and therefore let us do so now. They are all at one, then, in this, that they have all for object to shew, not the limits of Christian communion, like the articles of the creeds of too many subsequent churches,

* Acts i. 7.

but, on the contrary, its comprehensiveness. Altogether unlike any thing that had ever been heard of in Judea before, they teach distinctly, that neither difference of nation, nor difference of opinion in non-essentials, nor any such circumstance, should be any hinderance to Christian unity, provided all were agreed *to follow a pious and virtuous life, and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.* That was the rock on which the Redeemer himself said that He would build His church, so that the gates of hell should never prevail against it, and the apostles never narrowed the basis which their blessed Master laid. On the contrary, in exact keeping with the original institution of the Christian church, they extend the apostolic benediction "to all in every place who call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord," *—"to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." † In harmony with which, St Paul, giving directions to Timothy respecting his conduct as a minister of Christ, or bishop, charges him "to follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with all them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart." ‡ In fact, these divinely inspired men placed the true principle of Christian unity in a true spiritual relationship to Christ; and therefore, when addressing Christians, they entreated them to tolerate each other's conscientious differences, and, since God had received them, to receive one another. § They charged them, instead of dwelling on their differences, to look to the points wherein they were agreed, "to mind the same thing, to walk by the same rule," assuring them, that if they did so, those who were variously minded would soon be brought to be at one. || A beautiful principle this!—to arrive at truth through the medium of love! Let us but make the experiment. It is not from this

* 1 Cor. i. 2. † Eph. vi. 24. ‡ 2 Tim. ii. 23.
§ Rom. xiv. xv. || Phil. iii. 16.

passage of Scripture only that we learn it. It is embraced by that still more comprehensive principle of discovery which our Saviour announced, when he said, "If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself." *

We do, indeed, find the apostle Paul enjoining excommunication, and exercising it also, in the church of the Corinthians. But against whom? Against some unhappy believer who could not bring his mind to feel exactly in every point as others did? By no means. It was against an individual who had been guilty of a great and unnatural crime. And as it was in the primitive church, so ought it to be now. Doubtless, excommunication ought to be exercised where there is a just call for it. And for the Church's guidance, besides piety and a sound mind which can teach such occasions by the analogy of Scripture and of the covenant of grace, without particular precepts, the apostolic writings are very instructive on the subject. Thus, while the apostle Paul says, often in words and in spirit always, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," he says also, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha," † which were the words wherewith the Jews commenced their greatest excommunication, and not only cut off the offender from their society, but devoted him to eternal perdition. And lest it should be thought that these words, as here used by the apostle, mean no more than that those who love not the Lord Jesus Christ will come to this state if they continue in their hatred, we may quote another passage from his epistle to the Galatians, where he says, "Though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." ‡ Again, the apostle John having laid down a certain doctrine, says, If there come any

* John vii. 17. † Cor. xvi. 22. ‡ Gal. i. 8.

unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not unto your house, neither wish him God speed, for he that wisheth him God speed is a partaker of his evil deeds.* But the variation from his own preaching, which the apostle Paul anathematizes in his epistle to the Galatians just referred to, far from resembling those about which alone evangelical Christians differ, was "another gospel," or rather it was no gospel at all, for it was the denial of the merits of Christ for justification, and a recurrence to the law and to circumcision,—in a word, it was just the old system. And as to the persons whom St John recommends to the elect lady and her children, to have no familiar communion with, they were those who denied that Christ was come in the flesh. They were antichrists. And so in every case where excommunication is enjoined, enforced, or meditated. It was to be directed either against immorality only or the self-condemned heretic!† And was it to be summarily and hastily inflicted? "Take heed (says our Saviour), that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish. Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of

* 2 John 10. † Titus iii. 11.

two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

We search in vain in the New Testament for a warrant for any of those measures of force to prevent variation in matters of indifference, and to enforce uniformity, which have been resorted to in after ages, especially by the Church of Rome. What the inspired writers enjoin, in order to Christian unity, is the suppression of the irascible passions, and the cultivation of mutual esteem and forbearance in their stead. And, indeed, what else was to be expected from their divinely enlightened minds, if divine enlightenment be in harmony with reason and justice? For if it be the privilege, and, indeed, the duty, of every Christian, "to be fully persuaded in his own mind,"—if it be a principle in Christian ethics, that whatever is not of faith is sin, how absurd to think of using force, where the very thing to be done is to persuade! It was quite otherwise with the apostles. The nature of the case was always in their eye. And as they have never been equalled since, by a true zeal for the interests of the Church of Christ, so have they never been equalled in a true toleration. How different, their affectionate and soul-winning proceedings with their converts, from the inquisitions, tortures, executions, anathemas, and all the hateful and inhuman inventions of an after age! How different are the self-sacrificing apostles themselves breathing in all their epistles the most tender entreaties, from the lordly priesthood of an after age, strangely robing its spirit of tyranny in the language of the meek and lowly Jesus, and odiously trying thus to consecrate its native inhumanity! Thus the apostle Paul, writing to the Colossians, after having besought them to put off anger, malice,

evil-speaking, and the other outgoings of unregenerate nature, after having shewn the all-embracing character of the Christian dispensation to which Gentiles had equal right, and under which they enjoyed equal privileges with Jews, proceeds in these terms:—"Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body." * And similarly writing to the Ephesians, he says,—"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." † And similarly to the Philippians,—"Only let your conduct be as becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one Spirit, with one soul striving together for the faith of the gospel." ‡ And similarly in many other passages in the epistles.

It is farther to be observed also, that while the apostolic Scriptures are thus rich in passages setting forth the supremacy of the principle of evangelical love as the means and the outward bond of Christian unity, the inspired writers are also at much pains to shew how comprehensive the Christian faith is. Thus, there was nothing in the wide world so repulsively incredible to a Jew, as that a Gentile could be received and recognised as his equal in religion. Strong as may have been since,

* Coloss. iii. 12. † Eph. iv. 1. ‡ Philip. i. 27.

or may still be, the antipathy between the exclusive high-churchman and the impracticable dissenter, it is nothing to that which existed between a Jew and a Gentile, as has been already shewn. But in opposition to this reigning exclusiveness in his own nature and his own innate and educational conviction now wholly subdued by grace, St Paul assures his countrymen again and again, that all are equally the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ, that as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, male nor female, but all are one in Christ Jesus, all Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." * Here all visible differences, even those which were regarded as the most insurmountable and unavoidably isolating, are represented as done away and forgotten in the fulness of Christ, and in the all-embracing extent of Christian unity, of which faith in Christ is stated as the visible manifestation, and Christian baptism as the visible sign and warrant for commencement.

Those points, in which Christians must be one, the same apostle more pointedly enumerates in his epistle to the Ephesians.† There, after a passage, perfectly similar to that which has just been quoted, and a prayer that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ would grant them to be strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, that they being *rooted and grounded in love*, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that they might be filled with all the fulness of God; and after an entreaty (already alluded to) that those whom he addressed would walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called,

* Gal. iii. 26, and Eph. ii. 13. † Eph. iii.

with all loveliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, he adds, "There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."* Such are his words, which he plainly gives as encouragements to unity, not as limits to it. But immediately after, as if feeling that there might arise in the mind of the reader, perusing this description of the unities of the gospel, the idea of an absolute unity among believers, exclusive of all variety in feeling and opinion, he reminds the reader that along with these things which are unities in themselves, there coexists variety in believers. "But unto every one of us (adds he) is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." And as if to preclude the idea that the one faith he refers to were some voluminous set of articles similar to those to which the introduction of error gave rise in after ages, he immediately intimates that the faith when held by the most perfected saints is "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God." And what can the unity of the faith mean in reference to language, but the faith of Christ brought as much as possible to an unity as St Peter did when he laid the basis on which the church is built, and said, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God," and said no more? If, indeed, it be granted that there is an unity of the faith at all, in other words, that there have never been two or more faiths in the church, but one faith all along, it is plain that that faith, though it must embrace within it all Christian truth, must, nevertheless, be capable of being expressed in a very simple formula in language. For while it is certain that all the Old Testament worthies "did eat the same

* Eph. iv. 4.

spiritual meat, and drink the same spiritual drink"* with ourselves, it is equally certain that to reduce our faith to an unity with theirs, so that there might be "one faith" in the church all along, we should require to choose a confession expressing the very essence of true religion and Christian doctrine only, and containing, understood indeed (and wrapt up in it as leaves, flowers, and fruit are in the bud), but not expressed in detail any one of these points about which evangelical Christians are divided. We are ever too apt to rest contented with mere words, and to dwell exclusively on certain forms of speech. But the words of Christ are spirit and life. Truth admits of many forms in language, but in all, it is the spirit only that quickeneth, mere language apart from grace profiteth little.

In the latter part of the passage, which has led to these remarks, the apostle compares the Christian community to a body, and he concludes by recurring to his grand idea—which is indeed the characteristic principle of evangelical morality—namely, that the use of the whole economy is, that the church may make increase unto the building of itself up in love. And in touching here on the analogy between the church and a body, the apostle recurs to a favourite idea which he has expanded at great length in his first epistle to the Corinthians;† and this idea is so pertinent to the inquiry which now engages us, that it must not be too hurriedly passed over. "There are diversities of gifts (says the apostle), but the same spirit. And there are diversities of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God that worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the spirit is given to every man to profit withal." Such is his theme; and he then proceeds to illustrate it by stating the details wherein the diversity of gifts and

* 1 Cor. x. 3. † 1 Cor. xii. 4.

manifestation consisted, and then by shewing that the church of Christ, which is his body, is thereby made to resemble a true and living body, composed of an united system of varied members, each serving its own office, and co-operating with all the others to the general health and beauty of the whole. Now this very fine and striking passage of holy writ is very instructive on the subject of Christian unity. And, in the first place, it is obvious at first sight that it gives no countenance to the notion that an absolute uniformity is necessary. The leading idea which the apostle presents to us again and again, and under a variety of forms, is the unity of the spirit of God in the multiplicity of His gifts and operations. In the Corinthian church there were many glorious manifestations of the power of God. One member was honoured with important revelations of the future, another with the power of healing diseases, or of casting out devils, another had the gift of speaking languages which he had never learned—another of interpreting them and of rendering them intelligible to an assembly of the faithful. Such was the diversity of gifts possessed by different individuals. But it was quite rarely that any one individual possessed more than one of these powers at the same time.*

Now here is a state of things immediately instituted by God himself, and which may plainly be taken as a direct manifestation of His will. And although these miraculous outpourings of the Spirit have passed away with the occasion which demanded them, yet His more ordinary outpourings, always necessary for converting sinners, and for building up saints, have continued, and in their distribution, as has been already shewn, we find

* See an admirable discourse on this passage of Scripture by M. Grandpierre, a very eloquent and enlightened Protestant pastor in Paris, in his second volume of Discours Evangeliques, p. 50.

an exact analogy to that here described in the church of Corinth. But without asking the assistance of this fact, and taking the description of the apostle as a true picture of the will of God, in reference to a single church (as for instance that of Corinth), on what principle of reason could we infer it to be the will of God, that the whole church should not admit of a similar variety of manifestations in the unity of the spirit, as it enlarged its borders and its materials, and varied more in the circumstances and spiritual wants of the worshippers? If it appear that a certain state of things at the very fountain-head, where God is directly manifesting His own will, is in reality a variety of form in an unity of spirit, why not expect the same state of things over all the region where the fountain flows? On what sound principle can we conclude that unity of spirit, in variety of forms elsewhere, is contrary to the will of God? Such a conclusion, from such premises, is the very reverse of sound reason. But to what state of things would the variety of gifts thus instituted directly by God himself necessarily lead, even though the church extended no farther than to the population of Corinth? Should we not soon have a number of congregations, each gathered round some peculiarly gifted pastor? And whether we conceive these several congregations as forming themselves spontaneously, each worshipper going where he found his soul best fed, and his spiritual wants best supplied, or each recommended to worship in the parish where he resided, is it not certain that, equally in both cases, sooner or later, each congregation would acquire a peculiar character of its own, impressed upon it by the peculiar gifts of its pastor? And thus would there not soon arise a variety of churches in the city, analogous to that which we find in any large town in the present day? But still more if the church extended its bounds beyond the walls of Corinth, and if, by these peculiarly gifted

persons, one went to preach the gospel to one city at a distance, another to another, each differing from the others in its degree of civilization, its form of government, or in general terms, the state of humanity or of society, is it not obvious, that though the unity of the faith, and the essentials of evangelical worship, would be preserved every where, so long as miraculous spiritual endowment subsisted, still, great variety of form and feeling would unavoidably make its appearance; in a word, a state of things would arise highly analogous to what we find at present in evangelical churches, in different regions of the world; and all springing out of the primary variety of spiritual gifts, which God himself, who seeth the end from the beginning, had instituted in the primitive church? And is it not most desirable that a universal religion, a religion designed to embrace all mankind, from the savage of New Holland to the citizen of Paris, from the learned philosopher to the unlettered peasant, should possess this power of universal appliance, and admit of this variety of forms and manifestations, while yet the unity of the spirit, and the unity of the faith, remain entire? This last consideration, however, belongs to another part of this treatise, and we need not enlarge on it now.

Let us rather haste to remark, that while Christianity thus admits, so beautifully, of this variety of form and manifestation, provided always that the unity of the spirit be preserved in the bonds of peace, nothing is more inconsistent with the whole economy of the gospel, than a variety, where all is difference, and the bond of unity, the unity of the spirit, has been destroyed. Such a state of things constitutes schism and sect, than which nothing is more contrary to the spirit of love, and the design of the gospel, nothing more truly a fruit of the fall. It shewed itself first in the case of Cain, who, under the in-

fluence of a murderous jealousy, which took its rise in a difference of religious observance and award, slew his brother Abel. And the whole history of our species, from the day of Abel downwards, demonstrates the melancholy fact, that both, under true and false and all forms of religion, Satan is ever ready to take up the emotions which it awakes, and to ally them with the angry passions. Even under the Christian economy, notwithstanding its benignant spirit, human nature has still shewn the same perversity. Nay, even in the apostolic churches, and in the midst of the Spirit's effusion of miraculous gifts upon their members, strifes and divisions made their appearance, and party spirit and pride began to introduce odious and unchristian distinctions. Of the latter, we find some notices in the Epistles of St James, and of the former, too much evidence in the Epistles to the Corinthians.

In the Church of Corinth, chiefly, it would appear, through the malignant influence of some preacher who came down from Jerusalem to oppose the ministry of Paul, party spirit and personalism were carried to such a height, that when the Christian converts assembled to celebrate the Lord's Supper, instead of communicating harmoniously, as being one in Christ Jesus, they sat down in parties, separated from each other, and felt towards each other most uncharitably, and thus fearfully desecrated that holy ordinance.* Their contentions form the first subject which the apostle Paul takes up in his epistle; and it is very illustrative of our present purpose to observe how he handles it. But let us quote his words. After his usual opening, and some words of encouragement, he immediately, in these words, enters on the subject referred to:—"Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the

* 1 Cor. xi. 18.

same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" And thus he proceeds, until he concludes in these words, "Him that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." From these words, then, we learn that there existed, among the members of the Corinthian Church, contentions. Now, these the apostle, in another passage of this epistle, represents as so incompatible with spiritual Christianity, that he says, "Are ye not carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?" * And in another epistle, he ranks contentions among the works of the flesh (for the word here translated contentions, is the same that in the passage in the Epistle to the Galatians † referred to, is rendered strifes); and in another epistle, he ranks them foremost among the crimes for which "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, are coming." ‡ No wonder, then, that these strifes should receive his earliest attention in his epistle. And here let us mark how he proceeds in order to put a stop to them. Does he proceed (as has been so often done by those who have uselessly laboured in attempting to put down schism in after-ages), by giving a critical discourse, full of pretending demonstrations, dealing out praises to one party, and inflicting contempt and anathemas to another; and thus having pointed out in detail who was in the right and

* 1 Cor. iii. 3. † Gal. v. 21. ‡ Rom. ii. 8.

who was in the wrong, does he bind over the one party to join the other at their peril, or else to depart, and be rejected and condemned? St Paul, under the infallible guidance of the Spirit, could have done this without that hazard of error, from which none has been exempt since the apostolic age. But, on the contrary, we find nothing like this in the procedure of the divinely guided apostle. Although those who said they were of Christ were surely very deserving of commendation, compared with those who said they were of Paul, or of Apollos, or of Peter, yet to prevent an occasion of that envy and jealousy which such discriminations must inevitably beget, the apostle refrains from all such procedure as the pointing out of this; and, directing his exclusive attention to the fact, that where there are strifes among all, there are sins among all, he directs his reproof equally to all, and equally entreats, nay, may we not say conjures all to cease from their altercations, and to speak the same things, to agree about the same measures. He appeals directly to their calling as Christians. He charges them to make unity a matter of duty. Far from leading them to suppose, as all men naturally tend to do, that discussion would settle the point and restore harmony, he assures them "that knowledge puffeth up; that it is charity which buildeth up."* And further, as to the attainment of knowledge, he shews that, instead of seeking it by schismatic argument, in which the love of truth soon comes to be accounted nothing and the love of triumph every thing, they ought rather to seek it by the nurture of piety. "For if any man love God (says he), the same is made to know of him."† And, finally, on this subject, he takes occasion to assure them, that after all, if any man thinketh that he knoweth any thing he knoweth nothing, yet, as he ought to know, "that whe-

* 2 Cor. viii. 1. † 1 Cor. viii. 1, 3.

ther there be tongues, they shall cease ; whether knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."—"That now we see through a glass darkly ; but then face to face : now we know in part ; but then we shall know, even as also we are known."* In a word, it is to the love of God in Christ, it is to piety and the principle of love, that the apostle directs the Corinthians, in order to the re-establishment of unity amongst them,—not to speculative inquiry and theological philosophizing. "Now I beseech you brethren (says he), by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, in the same judgment."† In other words, he beseeches them, that, whatever variations may for a time unavoidably exist in their thoughts, they should keep these variations to themselves ; and as to what they say, speak the same thing ; and that, when they come to a decision or judgment in any matter, they should be unanimous. His words are thus rendered in the paraphrase of Macknight: "Now, brethren, since ye are called unto the fellowship of Christ, I beseech you, by every consideration implied in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all agree in the same measures for promoting the interests of that fellowship, that there be no divisions among you, but that ye be firmly joined, as members of one body, by the same good affection towards each other, and by the same practical judgment." And, indeed, that this is the true spirit of the apostle's entreaty, that it was a social unanimity, an unity at heart, not an identity of views in every particular, that it was Christian harmony and unanimity which the apostle urges so earnestly upon the Corinthians,

* 1 Cor. xiii. 8. † 1 Cor. i. 10.

is obvious for many reasons. In the first place, it would not be reasonable, it would be nothing short of absurd, *to entreat* a large society of individuals, differing in natural endowments, education, and means of grace, as the Corinthian converts undoubtedly did, to entertain the very same opinions and views in all points relating to religion. Whether such uniformity be possible or desirable in any case, is another question. It is a state of things, at all events, to which entreaty does not apply. In the second place, the fault and the crime of the Corinthians, so far as we can learn, was not heresy or injurious variations in doctrine—not an error of the head. It was an error of the heart, even that same personalism which has been the great source of schism and the ruin of Christian unity in all ages. Says one, I am of Paul—says another, I am of Apollos—says another, I am of Peter—says another, I am of Christ, which was certainly making comparisons very daringly. Peter, when, in a moment of pious obliviousness on the Mount of Transfiguration,* he said, "Lord, let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias," was rebuked by a voice from heaven for naming even these great and glorified saints along with God's well-beloved son. Of how much sorer punishment were these Corinthians guilty? The very magnitude of their error shews, that the heart, not the head, was the source of it; for, if they had felt but a little, they must have perceived, that, compared with Christ, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, were nothing, no more at least, as Paul tells them, than ministers by whom they believed, through the increase which the Spirit gave to their planting and watering. But, in the third place, we learn from several passages in Paul's epistles, and more especially from his Epistle to the Romans, that he was very far from insisting upon an identity of views as

* Matt. xvii. 2.

to non-essentials among those who ought to live in Christian communion and Christian unity. The passage referred to, indeed, breathes so fully the whole of what I am endeavouring to express—it shews so beautifully, that, even in the midst of very undesirable variations in opinion and conviction, there may still be unity of spirit sufficient to constitute Christian unity—and it points out so beautifully the means by which such unity of spirit is to be produced and preserved, that, though it be somewhat long, I cannot refrain from introducing it here. The apostle had, just a few sentences before, given utterance to that most divine of all syllogisms, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." Then, after stating, as a motive to awake out of sleep, that the night is far spent, and the day at hand, and that therefore we ought to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light, he proceeds with practical directions on the subject of Christian communion in these terms:*—"Him that is weak in the faith, receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not, judge him that eateth, for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth: yea, he shall be holden up; for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth

* Rom. xiv.

God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good, neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith, have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is condemned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. We then that are strong, ought to

bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."

Now, from this precious passage of St Paul's writings, we learn that, among the Christians at Rome, there were two classes of converts, who differed remarkably as to their convictions respecting certain externals in religion. The one made distinctions between meats and days, and probably, through fear of eating meat that was offered to idols (for they were dwelling among idolators), they restricted themselves to the use of vegetables. This is what might be expected from Jewish converts, and it is generally believed that such they were. But it is enough for us to remark, that the apostle characterizes them as "those who were weak in the faith." The other class made no such distinctions. They were probably the Gentile converts, and such of the Jewish as had emancipated themselves from their educational prepossessions, and were able to walk by the rule of Christian liberty. But it is immaterial who they were. What we have to remark of the two classes, is, that the former, namely, the fastidious in external observances, were much given to judging and condemning those who lived in the enjoyment of Christian liberty, while the latter were given to despising the fastidious. Such was the

position of matters; and how does the apostle treat it? Does he, in virtue of his apostolic authority, enjoin uniformity in the external observances referred to? Or, shewing no toleration for religious prejudices and the voice of conscience, does he charge all to obey peremptorily his own positive precepts? On the contrary, knowing the hold which religious prejudice has even of those who are pious and safe, recognising the rights of conscience in its supreme authority over the individual, and acting in harmony with the grand principle, that not force, but increasing grace and knowledge only, and the new lights they bring with them, can banish prejudice and rectify the judgment, he leaves the differences as to external observances, which unhappily existed, to remain where they were for the time; and he directs all his energies to regulate the feelings which these converts should bear towards each other. As to the strong, he tells them that, instead of despising the weak, they should bear their infirmities, and rather restrict themselves to their rules of living, than occasion them to suspect the holiness of gospel requirements, in consequence of their free use of Christian liberty. And as to the weak, he tells them that, instead of judging and condemning those who saw no occasion for their fastidiousness, and enjoyed their Christian liberty, they should leave that to Christ. For next to Him in authority, is a man's own conscience; and it is no part of the duty of one Christian to judge and condemn another, who can righteously plead his conscience as his guide and his authority.

What a wonderful evidence of the power of the Gospel,—that Saul of Tarsus should not only recognise, but lay down and warmly advocate, such a principle! How different a man is he to-day from what he was when he assisted at the martyrdom of Stephen! How different are his breathings now from those threatenings and slaugh-

ters which he used to breathe against those who differed from him! "Let every man (says he) be fully persuaded in his own mind. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth." Exercise your judgment rather in this, not to put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in a brother's way. Your Christian liberty is good, but let not your good be evil spoken of by your uncharitable use of it. Do not let your Christian communion and fellowship be interfered with by differences about meats and drinks and days—matters of mere ritual. For the kingdom of God does not consist in such things, but in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. And these are points in which, when any man serveth Christ, not only "is he acceptable to God but approved of men;" for do not all who are entitled to the name of men, approve of those who are just and peaceable and cheerful? Let us, therefore, follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may build up another. And to this end let every one please not himself but his neighbour for his good, as Christ pleased not himself. In order to do so, you have indeed much need for patience and consolation. But you will be able to do all things through Christ strengthening you. And may the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded with Christ towards one another, that ye may with one mind and one mouth (unanimously and with concurrent expressions) glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.

Now this passage from the Epistle to the Romans is very illustrative of the passage in the Epistle to the Corinthians, which gave occasion to the quotation of the former here. The language is indeed almost the same. In the one, the apostle beseeches the Christian converts

that they all speak the same thing and avoid schisms, and that they be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. In the other, he prays that they may with one mind and one mouth glorify God. But from the immediate context in the latter case, we learn that this unanimity—this unity of spirit—was, for a time at least, to co-exist along with very considerable differences in conviction as to external observances. We are thus led, therefore, to infer that the former passage refers likewise to an unanimity based in mutual affection rather than identity of opinion in all matters, and rather to co-exist amidst variety of opinions than not to exist at all. Indeed this fact appears abundantly plain from the Epistle to the Corinthians itself. This church appears to have written to the apostle for advice on several questions on which they differed; and one of these was this very same question touching meats offered to idols, on which the apostle has written so fully to the Romans. On this point it appeared that some of the Corinthian converts were so weak that they still had conscience of idols, still looked upon them as realities, having some share in the government of the world; while others felt so proudly as to the emptiness of idol worship, that they were even disposed to join in the sacrifices in the idol temples for the sake of the good cheer that was going. Add to this, that some of them also denied even the resurrection of the dead;* and it will be immediately granted that when the apostle entreats them to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, in the same judgment, and to avoid schisms, he plainly implies that mutual forbearance and love should, for a time at least, form the bond and principle of unanimity, not identity of opinion. That is to be looked for in every case as the fruit not the fountain of Christian unity. Indeed we are not left to

* Chap. xv.

infer this. In this epistle, as in all the rest, next to the love of Christ, we find brotherly love insisted on as that which ought to be above all things. It is to the Corinthians that Paul says, "if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth."* It is to them that he gives that ample discussion already noticed, of the unity of the spirit in the variety of his gifts, comparing the Church to a body, in which, though there be some parts more honourable and some less honourable and comely, yet are the whole so balanced that there is no schism, but all the members have a care of one another. And it is immediately after, in order to the unity of the Church, that he lays down the supremacy of charity in utterances that never have been or will be equalled.

But it is now time to bring these illustrations to a close; not indeed because the Word of God has been exhausted of even a tythe of what it says in favour of unity among Christians, even in the midst of variety as to secondary differences, but because enough has I think been adduced to convince any one who is open to conviction, that not such differences in secondary points, but a schismatic spirit is contrary to evangelical Christianity. But so contrary and so killing to all true Christian life and unity is this spirit, that though a church may be nominally one, yet if a schismatic spirit prevail there, it is in reality divided and torn; and though various churches may go under different denominations, yet if they hold the head and love each other as brethren, they are in reality one. With regard to excommunication, that fruitful source of division which has so often necessitated and even consecrated schism, it is not in the gospel that any warrant is to be found for its exercise in reference to such trivial variations in doctrine or ritual as have in after ages been

* 1 Cor. xii.

visited even with tortures and death in its cruelest forms. Notwithstanding all the errors in doctrine and practice which prevailed in the church of Corinth, so well was the apostle Paul aware (as has indeed been already stated), that it was only by mutual love that they could be edified, that he excommunicated none but the one who had been guilty of a revolting crime. And when the church, acting on his authority, put his sentence in execution with that excessive severity, it would seem, which human nature has even tended to practise in such cases, he reproves them in his second letter for their want of compassion on him who had fallen.

Against heresy, indeed, as well as against schism, the gospel lifts an emphatic voice. But here it is needful to be remarked, that we do not find, in reference to this term, any warrant for such an use of it, as later churches have made. The Church of Rome, for instance, names every slight departure from its forced uniformity and multitudinous tenets a heresy! Now this is a perversion of the term. The Romish priesthood have, indeed, the Jewish Church in the times of the apostles as a precedent for such an use of it, for the Jews charged Paul with heresy, as he himself informs us. "This I confess unto thee (says he to Felix), that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the prophets."* Nor is it to be wondered at, that a corrupt church should get up the cry of heresy against any one who has the boldness to differ from her at the time being. But such an use of the term is not only unwarrantable, but contrary to scripture. For there we find the term heresy too minutely defined to admit of such an use. In fact its sense is limited in the apostolic rule which relates to it, so as to exclude all such application

* Acts xxiv. 14.

of it. "A man that is an heretic," says St Paul to Titus, "after the first and second admonition, reject, knowing that such is subverted and sinneth, being self-condemned." * And these words enable us also to understand why heresies should be included among the works of the flesh.† For they preclude the idea that heresy is an error of the judgment merely, the conscience approving. The heretic, says the apostle, is self-condemned. Now this can never be the predicament of a man who is acting conscientiously. He may indeed be condemned by truth, revelation, and right reason, but he cannot be self-condemned until after his conscience has been enlightened. But that those whom the apostles charge with heresy were self-condemned, fully appears. Thus, describing those "damnable heresies which certain false prophets should privily bring in," St Peter not only says of them that they should deny the Lord that bought them, but that through covetousness they should, with feigned words, make merchandise of believers; and, in fact, he afterwards shews that they were the worst of men, so that they must have been self-condemned.‡

But the excommunication of persons possessing approving consciences, solely on account of certain variations in matters of secondary importance, is inexpedient and wrong. And so is dissent in similar circumstances. And scarcely can too strong terms be used to point out the magnitude of that blunder which certain religionists are ever subject to fall into, when they dissent from the church they have previously belonged to, while yet they admit that the constitution of that church is evangelical. The feeling of moral discomfort at being connected with what is regarded by them as an impure communion, is not a sufficient excuse for forming a new sect. Although the churches to which the apostolic epistles are addressed plainly

* Titus iii. 10. † Gal. v. ‡ 2 Peter ii.

erred, both by defect and excess, and in morality as well as in doctrine, and that to a degree painful to think upon, still, nothing is farther from the minds of the apostles who address them, than the encouragement of separatism on the part of the pious. On the other hand, what says St Paul to the Romans? "Now, I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."* Nor is it such persons only that the Christian must be on his guard against. Our Saviour informed his disciples that many false prophets should arise, and should deceive many;† and, in reference to them, he says, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Nor does he leave the Christian without a mark by which they may be known. "Ye shall know them (says he) by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns? or figs of thistles?"‡ In like manner, the apostle Paul, in his most touching address to the elders of the Ephesian Church at his final parting from them, says, "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch."§ In a word, it is plain that the Christian, whether teacher or taught, must ever be on his guard against corruption and seduction. But this is one thing; and to make a schism and separation in a church whose constitution is admitted to be evangelical, is another. The former is right and necessary, the latter is unnecessary and wrong. What usually moves to separatism in our day is the desire for a purer communion. And, indeed, the word of God commands Christians not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers,

* Rom. xvi. 1.
† Matt. xxiv. 11.
‡ Matt. vii. 15.
§ Acts xx. 29.

because there can be no accord between light and darkness, between Christ and Belial, between the temple of God and idols.* And every one must see the necessity and wisdom of such a command. But it does not apply to a Christian who feels disposed to dissent on account of the faults which happen to exist at the time in the church which he belongs to, and whose creed and constitution he admits to be evangelical. Communion with idolators was quite another thing. Those from whom the Purist would separate profess faith in Christ, and claim to be Christians as well as he. Far from being professors of idolatry, they would feel wronged at their Christianity being doubted or suspected. Great, nay appalling, as were the corruptions of the Church of Corinth, we find that, with the single exception of the incestuous person, St Paul only exhorted, entreated to unity, and promised more grace if unity were maintained. To leave a church simply because we desire a purer communion than our neighbourhood happens to supply, while yet we can lay to its charge none of those scandals which, according to apostolic precept, demand our separation, is to act in opposition to many evangelical principles. It is to please ourselves instead of seeking others good.† It is to esteem ourselves more highly than others.‡ It is to become judges of another's servants.§ It is to become judges of evil thoughts.‖ Nor is this all. It is to leave the mother who taught us the way to God, and who (if we are right in our own ideas of our greater holiness and purity) only needs many such as we are to be all that we could wish her to be. It is to take away the salt which ought to have been used to preserve the mass from corruption.¶ It is to set apart and by itself the leaven, which being mixed, ought to have leavened the whole lump. It is

* 2 Cor. vi. 14. † Rom. xv. 1. ‡ Phil. ii. 3.
§ Rom. xiv. 4. ‖ James ii. 4. ¶ Matt. v. 13.

to take away the wheat, and leave the whole field to the tares.* It is to hide our light under a bushel, when, had it been duly put in a candlestick, it might have given light to the whole house.† It is to expose ourselves to a disappointment which we ought to have foreseen, namely, that, though for some years, while our new communion continues small, and consists only of those piously disposed persons who formed it, it may continue pure, yet, when it increases, or even when it owes its continued existence to ordinary descent and hereditary religion, then, like other communions, it will unavoidably fall into corruption and laxness of discipline likewise, naturally growing, in fact, in the course of Providence, and, notwithstanding all the purism of its first founders, into what the word of God leads us to expect that every branch of the visible church will be,—a net containing fishes of every kind, a field containing tares as well as wheat.

Doubtless it were desirable beyond all things, that every one who claimed the name of Christian, were both almost and altogether a Christian. Doubtless every Christian ought to endeavour, above all things, each in his own walk, and by his own walk, to bring all to the unity of the faith, to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus, that the name of God may be glorified by the whole church, and that hallowed may be the name of our heavenly Father, and his will done on earth as it is in heaven. But is this glorious cause, and the supremacy on earth of the God of love to be advanced and established by breeding schism upon schism? Is it by every little spirit shewing that his soul is still more minute and more exact than the little spirit he differs from? Is it by each erecting a barrier, proportionally small indeed, but yet insurmountable, between Church-

* Matt. xiii. † Matt. v. 15.

man and Dissenter, between Lutheran and Reformed, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Independent,—between Pædobaptist and Antipædobaptist, Freewill Baptist, Seventh-day Baptist, Six-principle Baptist, &c. &c. &c.?

Oh! what a contrast to all this did our blessed Saviour himself during all His life on earth display, as he went about continually doing good, preaching pardon, and praying for the unity of His disciples, and laying down grand principles of righteousness and love, the very type of true magnanimity in all things! What a contrast was He to the little spirits of our day, the sickly little spirits, who are ever thinking, ever proposing, ever stickling, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth; ever lingering, ever stopping, ever meeting and ever splitting; ever making the name of the Son of the God of love the occasion of manifesting the native coldness and hatred of their hearts; as if hatred were not hatred, when it had succeeded in setting itself off in the language of religion; as if hatred were devotion, and not as it really is, twofold more damnable, when professing to be awoke by the love of Christ. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." * Our blessed Redeemer! thus calleth He on us. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." † The apostle Paul,—so calleth

* Matt. v. 44. † Eph. iv. 1.

he on us. "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing."* The apostle Peter—so saith he. And need we quote again from the other apostles, James, and John, and Jude.

But how is this responded to amongst us? Alas! when any scheme, based on some Catholic principle, which may equally embrace all evangelical Christians, is proposed, I cannot go along with them, says one—I cannot go along with them, says another. And why? Because, forsooth, each thinks something in it, or in the other who takes a lead in it, wrong. And because of this single point, which he takes to be wrong, he is blind to all that is right in the enterprise. That—every body grants to be right, why need he mind it! He perceives something wrong. Let that be brought out. Let the discriminating power of his religious principle fully appear! Let his egotism have vent. It may be, after all, nothing more than merely a dispute about words. Still he deems it wrong. Perhaps, after all, he can say little against it, but that it does not please him. Still he will have nothing to do with it. And whether he be guilty before God in this state of conviction, seeing that, instead of being aware that it is all a work of mere egotism and self-esteem, he regards it as a work of conscience, we will not inquire. But hence it comes to pass that many a man who is active as to every little religious matter of his own, draws back and remains idle as to every great matter; or if not idle, then opposing it, ever seeking for listeners to whom, in his anxiety to have a broader basis for his opposition than his own questionable sensibilities, he may shew how wrong they are, how right he is. Hollow demonstra-

* 1 Peter iii. 8.

tion, without either arguments or evidence, which are not balanced on the other side. "I feel (says he), I feel." No doubt he feels. But "let him have his feelings to himself before God." Happy will he be if he condemn not himself in that thing which he alloweth. For these convictions, these feelings, which are awoke by these exclusive views, and which will not listen with candour, or grant toleration to those of the other side, are usually no better than mere sensibility, the spawn of mere temperament, the fruit of the flesh swelling in ignorance and ripening into ashes.

Oh, how opposite to all this quibbling about matters of dubiety, how different from such points as those which now divide the evangelical churches, were those inquiries which Jesus made as to the mind of those to whom He committed the first preaching of His gospel just before He left them for heaven. He put three questions to the apostle Peter, whose inconstancy invited his being singled out for such a trial. And what were these questions? Was the first about shades of doctrinal difference? Would you say that it touched on supralapsarianism, or sublapsarianism, or Armenianism? Was the second about the form of a ritual? Would you say that it touched on being too symbolic, or too simple, that it savoured too much of Popish splendour, or too much of puritanical rudeness? Was the third about church polity and government? Would you say that it made for Episcopacy, or Presbytery, or Independency, or something new? Let us hear our Saviour's own words. They were uttered on the shore of the sea of Tiberias, and after the apostles, whom He met there, had partaken of a repast which He had miraculously provided for them. Jesus saith to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.

He saith to him again a second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."

What, then, was the first point on which the apostle was questioned by our Lord? It was whether he loved Christ. And what was the second? It was whether he loved Christ. And what was the third? It was whether he loved Christ. Thus the love of Christ was made to embrace and imply every qualification. And what were the three charges which our Saviour delivered to the apostle? Did he instruct him well how to be a good polemic in church and state, and how to stickle and to sting well, and how to exaggerate an error of a Christian brother, and shew that it leads to ruinous consequences, all charged to its author, though he does not acknowledge one of them? What are the charges which our Saviour actually gives? The first is "Feed my lambs." Nor need we wonder at this, for the pastoral care is plainly the first duty of the pastor. But what is the second? It is feed my sheep. And what is the third? It is feed my sheep. And this is all! And thus, as the love of Christ was made to imply every thing in point of doctrine, so is the pastoral care made to imply every thing in point of duty.

But Peter was presumptuous, and there was still room for him to suppose that his own vocation, notwithstanding the emphatic manner in which it had now been limited, did not preclude him from interference with others. Our Lord, therefore, having delivered, in language of touching tenderness, a prophecy as to the persecutions that

awaited the apostle in his old age, adds to his former charge, yet this other, "Follow me." And out of this command arose a scene full of most precious instruction to us. John was present; and he followed our Saviour as well as Peter, which observing, the latter said to Jesus, "Lord, what shall this man do?" And to this question our Saviour gave this most instructive answer; "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me." Such was the ultimate limitation of his calling. He ought to mind his own charge, and that only. And would, that all Christians would but go and do likewise, for then there would be none of those unwarrantable interferences of one man with another, which are ever kindling strife; but all looking unto Jesus the Saviour of all, and following him, all would be as one in seeking a holy life, and the glory of God; and whatever the variety of gifts and forms which might continue in different men, or in different churches, still there would be a true unity in the church, as a whole; and it would be acceptable to God, and approved of men, and many would be added to it daily, by such as should be saved.

But it is not so with us. And how shall we answer to the God of love, before whose judgment-seat we must all appear? Shall we trust in our word of wisdom, or to our word of knowledge, to our faith, or to our gifts of healing, to our miracles, to our prophecies, or to our tongues? Alas, we have nothing of the kind to trust in. But though we had,—though we were tenfold more highly gifted than the apostle Paul himself, still our gifts, if without the grace of charity and love, would not acquit us, would not avail us. For what says he, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all

faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

THE WHOLE BIBLE.

The question, whether of the two is most congenial with true religion, and the spirit of the gospel in the present state of society; *first*, an absolute uniformity over all, as the Church of Rome maintains, and in favour of which many Protestants feel prepossessed; or, *secondly*, an unity of spirit, in variety of form, such as that which all evangelical communions, if united in mutual recognition and love, might immediately display, has now been answered, by viewing each part of the Bible separately, and considering the whole as composed of the writings of

Moses, the Prophets, the Evangelists, the Apostles. And here we may recapitulate, in a few words, the results which we have obtained.

In reference to the writings of Moses, we have found that, summing up his whole history of the Church, it displays in a very remarkable manner a great variety of forms at different times, though with an unity of spirit all through. Thus, as to the priesthood, when the world was in a certain state, as for instance, in the days of Cain and Abel, each man was his own priest. Afterwards, as, for instance, in the days of the patriarchs, the father of the family only was the priest. Afterwards, as, for instance, under the Mosaic institution, one tribe or family was set apart for the priesthood, and there were no priests besides in any other of all the families of that nation in which the true religion was vested. In like manner, as to sacrifices, ritual, &c. they were for long, offered in kind, time, and place, determined (at least as is generally thought), by the dictates of the individual piety of the worshipper. Afterwards, they were regulated in all these particulars by laws which could only be violated at the peril of the worshipper. In a word, whatever feature of religion we turn to, we are called upon to observe, as the circumstances of the worshippers change, a great variety of form developing itself—or rather, we ought to say, developed by God; for during all this æra God kept the Church in immediate communication with himself, or immediate dependence upon Him.

Such were the results we obtained from consulting Moses; and from this state of things we concluded that if, instead of existing *successively*, as there did then in the families who constituted the Church, there existed *simultaneously* a great variety in the circumstances and states of society in different regions of the earth, as there does now in the families for whom the true religion is

designed, a similar variety of forms in religion, provided the same unity of spirit were maintained over all, would be just as suitable; and that, since the development of the primitive Church was the immediate work of God, the existence of variety of form in the Church now actually extant, provided there be unity of spirit along with it, is not to be rashly condemned as a thing improper in itself, or contrary to the will of God.

In reference to the prophets, in like manner, we found that whether we fix at once on that inimitably beautiful picture of Isaiah, where he represents the gospel Church, or notice that of Ezekiel, or those of the Psalms, or the vision of St Peter, or any other symbolic or prophetic representation suitable to the case, we are equally led, not to an absolute uniformity over all, but to an unity of spirit in variety of form as conspicuous in the picture given of the universal church. Thus we find that Isaiah presents to us, as a representation of the Christian church, all the various species of the creation, dwelling in mutual harmlessness and love on the holy mountain; that David presents to us as its picture, the city of Jerusalem with its manifold towers, palaces, bulwarks; that, in the vision of St Peter, it is figured by all manner of creatures legally unclean as well as clean, as it is elsewhere by the ark, which contained the whole variety of the creation. In a word, all that we found led to the same view; namely, that though an unity of spirit ought unquestionably to pervade all, and prevail over all, yet a great variety of form is compatible with that unity, and is to be expected in that Church, which was then in their eye, and now is.

Turning, then, from the Old to the New Testament scriptures, we found that our Saviour represented his Church, though all under himself as the only shepherd, yet as composed of various folds, and we gathered with certainty from his own mouth, that the bond which

unites his disciples into one is not any outward agreement in ritual, confession, &c. in a word not any mere outward act of uniformity, but a spiritual relationship to Himself (like that of the body to the head, the branch to the vine), and through Him to one another. Here, also, we found a new development and emphasis given to the principle of unity, in so far as it does and ought to manifest itself between man and man. "A new commandment (said our Saviour) give I unto you, that ye love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one towards another."

Leaving the evangelists, then, for the apostolic epistles, we found the same doctrine so largely set forth, and we dwelt so minutely on its evidence as there displayed, that we need not return to it now. In the apostolic epistles also, harmoniously with the books of the prophets, we found that the church is compared to a body composed of many members all united into one, differing in form and office, but all agreeing, and mutually honouring and assisting each other; also to a temple built of many variously fitted stones, united by one chief corner-stone. In short, the review which we have taken of each of the sections into which the scriptures may be conveniently divided, has led us to the same conclusion,—and that all in opposition to the idea that an universal uniformity among all churches is indispensable to unity,—all in favour of the idea that there may be a true and Christian unity in the midst of much variety in outward forms.

Our argument from the scriptures is not complete, however, unless we view them as a whole. For, though the Bible may be viewed as a volume of inspired tracts, each having an independent unity of its own, and its own epoch, authorship, and signification, yet the Bible, considered as a whole, is also an unity. It is, in fact, that unity which is emphatically "the truth." It is the whole

truth, and nothing but the truth. A few words are therefore required on the bearings on our argument of the Bible considered as a whole.

And to what conclusion shall we be led, if we view the Bible, as well as the ark, or the holy city, or the holy mountain, as a type and representative of the church? We shall find that the testimony which it gives is altogether one with that which all the others give. In a word, what a beautiful illustration does the Bible supply of an all but infinite variety, yet with a perfect unity of truth and spirit therewith! How different from those dry productions named codes of laws, decrees of councils, canons, creeds, and the like, which mere human intelligence has composed, is that volume in which the law of God is contained! What a beautiful development and display of truth from Genesis to the Apocalypse! The path of revelation, like that of the just, which it opens, "is like the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." "As the earth bringeth forth fruit herself, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear, so is the kingdom of God,—so is the course of revelation, of which the Bible is the sum. All is life, change, development. And though such be the value of the sacred volume, that, if a man do but cast his desires into it, with pious trust and expectation, as a man casts seed into the ground, and though he but sleep and rise night and day, in other words, though he have not much understanding of the theory of revelation, or of the Bible as a whole, at once successive and simultaneous, yet still the spiritual life will spring up in his heart, he knoweth not how; and all will be well with him. But he who studies the blessed volume, each book in relation to the times in which it was communicated, and the circumstances of the people to whom it was first given, and each also in relation to each other book, and

the whole in relation to himself, will have his piety still more amply rewarded by many a grand discovery of unlooked-for truth. Yes, every page of the sacred volume will become endeared to his heart and conscience. His reason, as well as his faith, will feed upon it. Its truths will come home to him. He will not need merely to submit to its dictates, as the desultory or merely formal reader must ever do, if he is to maintain his piety in the perusal of it. Instead of needing to submit, the Bible student will embrace. And among other discoveries he will make, is that which it belongs to our present object to insist on, namely, the beautiful variety of form always in the unity of spirit, which the word of God displays. Moses, David, Isaiah, Amos, Ezekiel, Daniel, Paul, James, John, how varied their different styles, their different subjects, their different objects, their different lights; in a word, how varied the books themselves, which the Holy Ghost through them has bequeathed to us! Yet, with all that variety, what unity of spirit and of truth!

If, then, we are to take the Bible, as a whole, as representing the Catholic Church, whose charter it is,—if we are to view its individual parts as analogous to individual churches, we are led by this, as by all the other evidence which we have deduced from the Scriptures, to regard an unity of spirit in variety of form, not an absolute uniformity over all, as a constitution of the universal church, which the Scriptures even lead us to expect at least during a certain epoch, and one which, while the state of society is such, that a variety of form in an unity of spirit is peculiarly well adapted to supply the spiritual wants of the pious,—peculiarly fitted for gathering in the elect,—is not to be condemned on any scriptural grounds.

But let us now view the argument in the light of reason.

PART V.

THE

LIGHT OF REASON.

THE ARGUMENT FROM THE LIMITS TO UNIFORMITY.
. . . . . THE ANALOGY OF NATURE.
. . . . . THE PRINCIPLE OF BEAUTY.
. . . . . FITNESS AND UTILITY.
. . . . . THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE, AND THE MEANS OF GRACE.
. . . . . THE LIMITED NATURE OF THE HUMAN MIND.

CONCLUSION.

ON THE LIMITS TO UNIFORMITY IMPLIED IN THE VERY IDEA OF AN EXTENDED OBJECT OR INSTITUTION, SUCH AS A CHURCH.

We proceed next to view our subject in the light of reason; and, with a few arguments in this point of view, we shall close it up, and leave the reader to his own convictions.

In an early section* it was shewn, that a strong prepossession in favour of an universal uniformity in the church might be expected in men in general, independently altogether of any positive evidence or arguments in its favour, and solely from the inherent and indiscriminate love of uniformity and order which animates the human mind. Let us now inquire how far such a prepossession is *reasonable* in reference to the Christian Church. And does it not immediately appear that there are limits to an absolute uniformity which cannot be removed, and which necessitate at all times the existence of no small variety in the unity of the visible church?

In fact, how can any visible object, whatever its nature, possibly possess an universal uniformity? Say that it is but a circle, which, of all visible objects, is the most simple, compact, and united. Have we not even here a centre and a circumference, and many different points lying between them, dissimilarly related to both, and to one another? Yes, even in a circle, and that however small, there must be variety as well as unity. But

* P. 93.

it will not be denied that a circle possesses an unity as perfect as any visible object possibly can possess; and that what is true of a circle, as to the limited character of its unity, must be true of all other visible objects. It appears, therefore, that the unity appropriate to visible objects is not, and cannot possibly be an absolute unity. It can only be a modified unity. It can only be an unity in variety. It cannot possibly be an unity, consisting in an universal uniformity and sameness in all respects and every where. It can only be an unity, consisting in a variety of harmonizing objects, all pointing to a central principle or object, and made one by their harmonious relation to it. And what has thus been shewn in reference to every object that is visible, or consists in magnitude, may be seen at once to be equally true of every object that is made up of many, or consists of multitude. In every such case an absolute unity is similarly unsuitable. An unity in variety is alone appropriate.

Now, to apply this general reasoning to the particular case on hand, what are we to infer with respect to the true unity of the Church of Christ, or the unity which is alone appropriate to it? The reader will have already inferred for himself, that, if an absolute unity be unattainable and unsuitable, even to the simplest and most unchangeable object, if only it be visible, much more must it be unsuitable to such an institution as the visible church—the church which is not only designed to be extended over all the globe, and to embrace a multitude whom no man can number, but which consists of elements so intimately varied and so ever-varying, that, of all the millions which compose it, not one is similar to himself in two successive years of his existence—not one able to tell to-day what he shall be, or do, or suffer to-morrow—not one of them similar to another, but each actuated by his own inherent peculiarities—nay more,

animated by a principle of spontaneity, and a conscious freedom of choice, which recoil even from the very idea of compulsion and force. Such are the elements of the visible church. And are these the elements for which an absolute unity is suitable, an unity which has been shewn to be incompatible, even with the smallest form of inert materialism? Do we not find here rather the elements of an endless variety?

And when, turning from the abstract question, we look into the Gospel, and find it to be so spiritual, and itself such an unity, that all its principles may be comprised in one great truth addressed to the understanding,* and another great moral principle addressed to the heart,† and a third requiring that these two principles be inwoven into one in the unity of the soul‡—when we consider these things, does it not appear, on the very face of the question, that the unity of the church is an unity of spirit, strict and indispensable indeed, but yet most truly spiritual, so as to be in no degree impaired or deformed by all that variety which differences in people, nation, kindred, tongue, temperament, strength of reason, or light in conscience, suggest and render unavoidable.

Ought we, then, in reference to the Church of Christ, to indulge our minds any longer in their prepossessions in favour of an absolute uniformity therein? If our desires and expectations should be regulated universally by proprieties and possibilities, is it reasonable to expect or demand an universal sameness in an institution selecting its objects out of every sphere of humanity, and wide as the world in its embrace? Where ought we, with such

* "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."—Acts xvi. 31.

† "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."—Rom. xiii. 10.

‡ "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith, that worketh by love."—Gal. v. 7.

obvious propriety, to desire and expect that spiritual unity which embodies a harmonious variety of external forms around it, as in this grand and universal institution, designed not only to embrace them all in its ample bosom, but also to be suited to the spiritual wants of the redeemed of every age, and every kindred, and people, and tongue,—a glorious multitude whom no man can number.

This appears very obvious, even when we extend our views no farther than we have been doing now, namely, to the visible church. But if we extend them to the Catholic Church, in its widest sense, the church that consists of all the redeemed,—those already in heaven, as well as those still on earth,—it is evident that there is no place at all for such an idea as absolute unity or uniformity over all. Doubtless there is in all the same unity of spirit, associating into one harmonious and pleasing company all the saints of God, whether glorified in heaven, or not glorified as yet. The views of the blessed are indeed brighter than ours, since theirs are of vision, while ours are but of faith. Their love is stronger, too, because they are nearer its fountain. But still they are one with us in spirit. This the whole tenor of revelation calls on us to believe. They are members of that one body, of which we, if we be Christians, are members too. It is obvious, however, that between them and us there can be nothing common in externals. In the worship of the blessed spirits in the realms above, who praise God amid the glories of the sky, there must be a vast difference from any forms of worship that can exist on earth.

In reference to the whole church, therefore, invisible as well as visible, it is obvious that the idea of an absolute uniformity, or any unity in which there is not great variety also, is quite out of the question. This

argument is, however, of a very general nature, and need not be longer dwelt upon. Let it, therefore, be only remarked further, that, even in the most comprehensive view of the church that can be taken, we find nothing anywhere to interfere in the least with the possibility and propriety of the most perfect harmony, the most perfect unity of spirit. Truth calls for the existence of this in every sphere where her voice can be heard.

THE ARGUMENT FROM THE ANALOGY OF NATURE.

Let us now direct our regards for a little to the visible universe around us, and inquire what it teaches as to the true form of the unity of the church. Let us consider the analogy of nature. Nor let any one suppose that these two,—nature and the church,—are things so heterogeneous, that they cannot be compared with propriety, nor from what actually exist in the one, an argument be raised as to what ought to exist in the other. It is, indeed, most true, that the world, using the term in the evangelical sense, is a thing existing in direct opposition to the church, and if the two are ever brought into comparison, it ought only to be in order to shew the contrast that exists between them. But the world, in the Scripture sense, is one thing, and that which, in modern science, is called Nature, the visible universe around us, is another. The former is a region of deformity and sin, the creation of Satan, and of the lawlessness of man. The latter is a beautiful sphere, where all is "very good," and still bears on every point the impress of the finger of God. Much has already been done for the interests of revealed religion, by shewing its harmonies with the analogy of nature; and certainly the argument of analogy may be

legitimately resorted to here. If, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth; if they are His institutions; if His will is embodied in them; if His power upholds them; if He gave them for *signs* as well as for seasons, and to shew forth His glory and his handiwork, as well as to minister to our mere enjoyments, it is surely safe to reason from the form and structure which He has imparted to them, to the form and structure of another institution which He has placed in the hands of man, and called on him to regulate; and which, though it cannot be constructed upon positive precepts furnished by revelation, both for want of a sufficient number, and for want of a general agreement among Christians as to the import of those which are, yet is admitted by all to approach nearer and nearer to what it ought to be, the more and more it is brought into harmony with the will and design of God? Let us, therefore, look to the form and constitution of the creation around us for light upon the question, whether an absolute uniformity over all, or unity of spirit in variety of form, be the true constitution of the Christian Church?

Carrying our thoughts, then, as high as possible, in the first place, even to the celestial intelligences who dwell altogether in the spiritual world, what do we learn as to the frame-work and constitution of their blessed society? Looking into the Scripture, which is our only source of knowledge on this subject, we find that they differ from each other in rank and power. We have not, indeed, information minute enough to enable us to describe their various orders in detail. But that such orders do exist in a series, is certainly very clearly intimated, when we find them classified, as we do in the Bible, into thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, angels and archangels. This is, indeed, a point which does not need to be dwelt upon. It will not be disputed. It has ever been

a prevalent and even a favourite idea, that there is a celestial scale of blessed intelligences extending upwards through cherubim and seraphim, from spirits which are but the glorified souls of the dead, to the archangel who stands on the very step of the throne of the Eternal. But where there is such a scale, there must be a corresponding variety. All forms and manifestations of intelligence and sensibility, compatible with holiness and pure blessedness, must be there. But, notwithstanding all this beautiful variety, it is certain that there prevails, amongst these glorious beings, the most perfect unity of spirit. The Scripture represents to us ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands standing all in the presence of the God whom they love, and joining all in the same hymn of praise.* A perfect unity of spirit, therefore, in a beautiful variety of form and manifestation, is that constitution of things to which the contemplation of the heavenly society conducts us. And what we thus find to be true of the celestial intelligences, considered as embracing angels and archangels, is true also, even if we confine our regard to the spirits of the redeemed only. For of them we learn that they, too, differ as one star differs from another star in glory.

And if from the spiritual we turn to the material heavens, we do but find another instance, in this sphere of the creation, of the same principle exemplified, as is indeed implied in the words of the apostle just quoted. Looking to the starry heavens, how perfect the unity, and yet how beautiful the variety that is over all! Directing our contemplations to the solar system, which alone, of all that is in the sky, can be said to be in any measure well known to us, what unity is here! Around the sun, as the centre of all, the whole system is seen revolving in the same direction in a beautiful harmony, as if all the individuals which

* Rev. v. 12.

compose it were animated by the same spirit. But is it an absolute unity withal? On the contrary, on nearer inspection, each planet, while it joins in the general harmony, proves also to have its own form, its own density, its own distances, its own movements; so that, along with an unity in spirit, there is a pleasing variety over all. Looking to the material heavens, then, we find that the same form and constitution has been given to them, which we have just had occasion to observe in the heavenly hosts. In what is revealed above us to the material eye, just as in what is revealed to the soul in the same regions, we find that unity of spirit in variety of form and manifestation, is the order of nature, the frame and constitution which the Creator has imparted equally to the angelic and the sidereal systems which He has made.

But let us now descend from the contemplation of the glories that are above us, in order to cast our regards around us, on our own level, and beneath us, and what is the order of things which we find instituted here? Look to the constitution of the mind of man. What variety of faculties and feelings,—sensation, perception, memory, imagination, attention, judgment, love, hatred, joy, grief, gratitude, anger, revenge! And yet how completely are all these held together in that unity which one calls—I,—myself! In our mental constitution, therefore, we find still a recurrence, by the Creator, to the same order of things. And in man's outward form and constitution, in like manner, how completely is the same principle illustrated. All are ever one in all the primary lineaments of humanity, but yet is our species so varied into races, and each race into the individuals that compose it, that no such thing was ever yet found among all the millions of the world's population, as two individuals who were quite similar to one another. Each,

while he still bears about him the indefeasible lineaments of humanity, has also a character and a form of his own, so that, on the one aspect, out of the unity of humanity, an all but infinite variety has been developed, and on the other, all this variety continues still to be ever embraced by the unity of humanity.

And if from the individuals of our race themselves, we turn our thoughts to the pursuits they are following, what endless variety here! But yet not a variety without an unity in spirit too. For however various, in the general darkness, are the roads they take, still happiness is the one object which all are pursuing,—the one star round which all are sailing, traversing, and reeling.

And corresponding in form to this variety in individual pursuit, are the governments which all men are under. Nor is the consideration of government to be rejected from our argument, for we know that it is "an ordinance of God," by which those who are the slaves of criminal indulgence, may be prevented from destroying the order of society, and interfering with the liberty of the others. Well, then, conjoined with this unity of object, what variety in governments! One nation is well under a hereditary monarch, to whom the whole population yields an unconditional obedience, and from whom all law emanates as from a source. Another is well in a republic, where the whole population co-operate in framing the laws by which they shall be governed, and with no other head but one of themselves, chosen from time to time, to act as president. Another is better than either, where the government is in the form of a kingdom, where a hereditary prince, whose treasury is in the keeping of his people, administers the laws which his subjects of all classes co-operate with him in framing, and in reforming, from age to age, so that they may be always co-ordinate with the advancement of society.

Nor is this all. Besides these three great types of government, many other intermediate forms are conceivable, and many such do in point of fact exist, and they are often excellently suited to the peculiar states of society which have called them into being. Yet, though so varied in form and manifestation, all these institutions are one in this, that each is a government, and all have for their object to form a bond of social security and peace.

But let us now make the third and last step in our progress. Passing from the intellectual world, and from man, the lord of this lower creation, let us contemplate for a moment the globe itself, and the creatures which inhabit it. What all but infinite variety is there here! and yet what harmony, what unity, along with it every where! Let us peruse the 104th psalm, which nothing can equal, either in a truthful description of the variety of the creation, or in poetic or picturesque beauty. In that inimitable composition, the variety displayed by every kingdom of nature, is brought before us in the very spirit of the subjects which are described, while, in the composition of the sacred hymn itself, also the same unity of spirit and variety of detail is beautifully preserved.

Treating of the richness and variety of the physical system, the inspired poet brings under our eye successively the heavens, stretched out like a curtain, the seas like a floor, the clouds like chariots, the wind like wings, the foundations of the earth fixed as if they should never be moved, the waters ever moving, ascending, descending, going, returning. Now, though such be the variety which the physical economy displays, the most recent discoveries of modern science all point to the conclusion, that all this rich and beautiful variety of the inorganic kingdom is composed of one and the same elementary substance or material principle. And it is no longer a matter of conjecture merely, that all the variety which

the Psalmist next brings under our notice,—valleys and mountains, river-courses and plains, day and night, summer and winter, the moon marking seasons by her variations, the sun knowing the time of his setting,—it is matter of demonstration, that all this variety results from the operation of a single law, is all embraced by the single principle of gravitation. In like manner, the variety of the vegetable kingdom, so beautifully touched by the Psalmist in the same divine hymn,—the full-grown cedar of Lebanon, the trees with leafy branches, where the little birds sing, and those yielding food, wine, oil, bread, and herbage, for the use of man, and grass for cattle,—all this exquisite variety is developed out of a single principle of life, a single organic tissue. It is, however, in the animal kingdom, most especially, that we find this beautiful and all-pervading principle of unity of spirit in variety of form, most emphatically embodied. And here, too, let us not fail to remark the beautiful variety which the Psalmist brings under our notice in the same ode: The beasts of the field, the wild asses coming to quench their thirst at the shady brooks, while the small birds are singing among the leafy boughs over them, and the cattle browzing on the grass growing around, the wild goats climbing the steeps of the mountains, and the jerboas leaping among the rocks, the stork building her nest among the tops of the trees, while the young lions are roaring after their prey beneath. As to the sea, likewise, it too is full of the riches of creation. There are reptiles and fishes without number, creatures both small and great.

Such is the variety of creatures which, even in this short hymn, the Psalmist brings under our notice. Now, it is truly a beautiful result of modern science, that this vast, this all but infinite variety of creatures, so different in their forms, habits, endowments, are yet all built upon the same plan, after the same model; and are, in a word,

the same idea, beautifully, and all but infinitely varied indeed, but still the same idea. Such is the admirable unity of spirit, in variety of form and manifestation, which the creation of God displays, whatever side we turn to.

And if such be the universal frame and economy of things, such the order of creation all over, all through, whether we look to the celestial intelligences leading their blessed lives under the immediate eye of God, or to the starry heavens celebrating, by their harmonious revolutions, the praises of the God who made them, or, from the beings above us, we turn and look to the things around us, whether the framework of the human mind, or of the human body, or of society, or of the animal, or of the vegetable kingdom, or of the world itself, which supports all this—if all over the works of God the order of things which He has established be not uniformity, but, on the contrary, an unity of spirit in a beautiful variety of form and manifestation, can we for a moment suppose that there is no place for such a state of things in the church? If the Father of all has instituted a certain order of things in His creation, and holds it out to our admiration every where in His works, both celestial and terrestrial, ought we not to expect that the frame of that society, which consists of His own elect, might be similarly constituted without offence? If He has so ordered His works, that even the world, where Necessity reigns, even the brute world, yields under His command out of its original unity, an admirable and all but infinite variety, can we for a moment suppose, that in that nobler sphere of His works where the principle of liberty comes into play, it is His will and design that all should be confined to a mere uniformity and iteration? If we see God giving such outgoings to His own liberty and intelligence as to produce above, below, and all around, an all but endless variety

of harmonizing institutions and objects out of the same materials; can we suppose, that after having given man a ray of that liberty and intelligence which is, as we see, ever tending, in this respect at least, to follow in His footsteps, and develope variety out of unity, He wills and designs, nevertheless, that in the church, which is emphatically His own kingdom, there should be nought but an absolute uniformity over all? Can we suppose it to be the requirement of Christ, that the church, which is his body, should consist exclusively in repetitions on all hands of the same member—that every part should present the same features, and an identity with every other part? Can we suppose it to be alone agreeable to Him, that the church, which is His temple, instead of being built of stones, fitted into every part, their form and sizes varying with their situations, should be composed of stones all similar to each other? It is not thus, at least, that He dispenses the gifts of the Spirit in the church. But here our argument merges again into the testimony of revelation, which has been already considered.

Confining our attention at present exclusively to the analogy of nature, however, does it not lead us to conclude, that the form of the church, considered as a whole, or an entire institution in harmony with the will and design of God, is not to be expected to be an universal uniformity, but, on the contrary, an unity of spirit in variety of form and manifestation? The analogy of nature, indeed, like all our other arguments, leads to a more symmetrical and orderly display of unity in variety than would be attainable by the union of all the evangelical denominations in the present day, as the beau ideal of the form of the universal church. But, looking forward to this as that which will be realized by a triumphant church, during an age of millennial glory, may we not safely infer from our argument, in reference to the mean time, that such unity

in variety as is possible to be attained, is still in harmony with the analogy of nature, and worthy to be sought after, and good if it were but realized?

THE ARGUMENT FROM THE PRINCIPLES OF BEAUTY.

The idea of an absolute uniformity in religion once introduced into the mind, soon suggests a variety of sentiments, if not of arguments, in its own favour. Of these, one is the conceived beauty of such an uniformity. And, indeed, when we look around us, and become painfully impressed, as every one must, by the discords and antagonisms between sect and sect which now agitate and disturb the Christian world and arm the infidel, it is impossible not to feel that that which exists is extremely ugly, and that unity were indeed most beautiful in comparison with it. And thus far all is well. Unity is undoubtedly that which ought to be. That, for want of which all is going to ruin, as I have endeavoured to set forth in the first pages of this work. But here it needs again to be repeated, that unity is one thing, uniformity another. Not but the substitution of the latter term for the former is to be expected; for the popular mind is, as has been already shewn, always materialist in its habits,* and, immediately after conceiving such an idea as unity, it tends to give a body and a form to that idea, and thus to degrade the holy and just desire of the soul for an unity in spirit in the Christian Church, into a gross demand in the imagination for uniformity every where, or a sameness of forms over all. And thus, in the popular mind, not accustomed to limit itself to accuracy of thought, unity in form, not unity in spirit, comes to be regarded as *the beautiful* in the church, and in the midst of such dis-

* Page 93.

cord as now exists, comes to be wished for as a consummation most devoutly to be desired. But if it be granted, as indeed it must, that what makes the idea of *uniformity* seem so peculiarly beautiful, is its contrast with the *discord* which at present reigns, this very fact detects the fallacy. For to advocate the cause of uniformity as a contrast with discord, is to make a most illogical transition. Discord and uniformity are things which belong to wholly different spheres. In the language of mathematicians they are heterogeneous quantities, and can neither be compared together nor introduced into the same formula. Uniformity is a thing of form. Discord is a thing of feeling. The contrast with discord, in respect of beauty, is harmony, not uniformity. And, in fact, it is to universal harmony in religion, not to an universal uniformity, that the enlightened voice of moral taste conducts us.

What, then, is harmony? and how is it produced? If we find out this, we shall find what ought to be in the church, in so far as this argument can guide us to it. We may remark, then, that harmony is not produced by a number of strings or pipes, equal in dimensions, sounding simultaneously, and similarly touched, in a word, uniform, and acting with uniformity. This gives monotony, not harmony. In order to harmony, the strings or pipes must be of very various dimensions. Variety is a condition indispensable to the production of harmony. But if this condition exist, then, though the variations amongst the strings or pipes be very great, we may still attune them, so as to cause the whole system to unite in giving utterance to the most heavenly harmony. In order to this, we have only to give ease to one, and to brace up another, until we bring the whole to what may be called an unity of spirit. This done, each then sympathizes and vibrates in response to another, and the tones emanating from the whole combination, instead of interfering with

each other, follow each other, instead of running against each other, and causing collision and confusion, fill up each other's intervals, and make the air resonant with the richest harmony. The conditions necessary to harmony, therefore, are such as cannot be better expressed than by calling them an unity of spirit in variety of form. And if the moral taste be seeking the truly harmonious in religion, it should be capable of admiring unity in variety there also.

But this is not all. These views do not apply to the beauty of harmony only. Unity of spirit in variety of form, is the principle of all beauty that is of a high order. Uniformity never can give rise to any but the lowest order of beauty, unless it be assisted by variety, and even in a great measure concealed by it. And, in point of fact, those beautiful descriptions of the catholic unity, which the poetic authors of the Church of Rome paint, when exalting the exclusive beauty and excellence of their own communion, though brought forward by them to shew the beauty of uniformity, do yet owe their own beauty not to that uniformity, but rather to that variety in the midst of which the idea of uniformity is introduced, and by which it is surrounded and set off. It is, indeed, a beautiful picture which the poet presents to us, when he paints to us the eye of God looking down upon the world revolving beneath Him, and bringing up successively every people and every land under the light of His countenance; and we behold, in beautiful succession, the inhabitants of the mountains, and the dwellers on the plains, and the ships on the deep seas, and every tribe, and kindred, and nation, as they come up, borne on the revolving sphere to the light of the morning, singing the same hymn of praise, offering the same incense, uttering the same prayers, while the ministering priest pronounces the same syllables. Perhaps, indeed,

the taste of the reader may be too strongly tinctured by reason to admire uniformity up to the pitch expressed in the last clause. But let it be admired to the full, it is easy to discover that the pleasing emotions which the picture awakes, depends not on the uniformity, viewed singly, but only taken in connection with the variety which is presented by the poet along with it. For, conceive the picture changed in this respect. Conceive, instead of mountains and valleys, rivers and seas, Europeans, Asiatics, Africans, all the variety, in short,—conceive that the surface of the globe were uniform all over, every region and spot similar to every other region and spot, and the whole human race uniform also, every man like every other man, every town like every other town; in a word, all things uniform, and would there appear any beauty in an universal uniformity of worship then? Nay, would not such uniformity, in that case, only add to the monotony and universal deadness, felt to be so oppressive already? Would not the taste thirst for some variety, as for a running stream in a desert?

But this argument need not be dwelt upon. It has been fully established, that the true theory of beauty, when generalized to the utmost, is unity in variety. And look to what sphere of the beautiful you please, you will find this truth every where exemplified. A palace, for instance, how tame and spiritless, when every aspect is like every other aspect, every wing like every other wing, every window like every other window, every column like every other column! A city, how formal and cold, when every house is like every other house, every street like every other street! A landscape, how dead, where all is a plain, and there are neither mountains nor valleys, nor lakes nor rivers! In order to beauty, there must be variety as well as uniformity. And hence the reason why nature is so beautiful;

for nature, while it breathes the same spirit every where, is full of variety. Look to the starry heavens, how tame and flat would even they be, were all the stars equally bright, and planted all at equal distances from each other! Would not Night, in that case, be shorn of half her glory? And would not the canopy appear, in that case, more like the work of man than of God. But look to the sky as it is. Are not the stars, as if constellated by the very hand of beauty? How pleasing to contemplate the various constellations! There the little closely compacted group of the twinkling Pleiades, rising out of the east, and the princely Orion lording it over all the south! Here the Ursa Major, his rival in the north; and overhead the curious Cassiopœia, which, does it not add vastly to the beauty of the heavens, zig-zag though it be? But though the variety be so beautiful, let it not be thought that it is itself and alone adequate to the beauty which it assists. This variety would only be bewildering and displeasing, were there no agreement among the objects which display it,—no principle of unity to form the whole into a system. But that there is. There is a certain unity of spirit which pervades all the stars, and fills the starry heavens. They all emanate the same beautiful beams of light. They all move in beautiful harmony from east to west, and round the pole! And it is this unity of spirit, in the midst of such variety of constellations of form and luminousness, which invests the starry heavens with their peculiar beauty, and with the power of awaking such a charm in the sacred eye of contemplation.

Now, could we but emancipate ourselves from all party spirit and educational prepossessions, each in favour of his own sect, and could we ascend so as to be able to look down to the church of Christ, as we are able to look up to the sky, why should we be displeased in be-

holding the variety there which we are charmed with in the heavens? Were but all denominations united, as the stars are, by an unity in spirit, why not regard the various evangelical churches as so many constellations of mind, each possessed of its own beauties? Why not view the whole as that very constitution of the kingdom of God which is most beautifully suited to the present state of the church, whose field is the world? If, in one region of that vast field, we see Christians gathered together in the close and friendly compact of Moravian brotherhood, why should we wish to destroy them, because they are unlike ourselves? We do not wish to destroy the Pleiades because they are unlike Orion or the Ursa Major. If, in other regions, we find another society of Christians still organized according to the polity of venerated ages, and submitting cheerfully, and counting it a privilege and not a burden, to be under episcopal jurisdiction, why should we wish to annihilate the economy which is sacred and dear to them, when they do not interfere with the liberty of others? Who would wish to see Orion dismembered because he is unlike the Pleiades, and, instead of being a little closely compacted group of stars, is a noble-looking and lordly constellation? No doubt, in the history of astronomy, we find much mention of his sword. But he never yet exterminated a single constellation with it; and of late that matter has been set at rest. For it has been shewn that he has no longer a weapon, and that the dazzling appearance at his side, which looks like a sword, is but the luminous mist of more distant stars, which neither belong to him nor to any other constellation. What though, unlike the Ursa Major, "his burning and shining lights" do not possess a parity of brightness, elevation, and distance. It cannot be denied that he is most beautiful in his own warmer region of the heavens, more so, in fact,

than any thing else that could be substituted in his place. And if, in another region, we find the Christian society there, constituted, of their own free choice, according to presbyterian discipline, why force bishops on them, as if denying that every pastor of a parish is a bishop, or as if maintaining that it is indispensable to good order in the church of Christ to believe that a bishop is essentially more than a presbyter. Deny that the presbyterial church is a church, will good men believe that you are an enlightened Christian for holding such an opinion? Destroy it, would the beauty of the universal church be increased by such an act? Would the beauty of the heavens be increased if the Ursa Major were away, and if Orion were to stretch out his already stretched-out arms beyond the pole? If this great constellation of the north have a rough and an illiterate name, whether we call it the Great Bear or the Plough, ought we not to remember that it never sets, and points so directly to the pole-star, that it is the very compass of the heavens, and the friend and the confidence of all who seek for guidance.

And yet once more; as in every region of the world we find some Christians associated into independent churches, concentrating each within itself an organization which needs only to be expanded, in order to amplify itself into presbytery or episcopacy, according to the direction given to it, why should we force upon those who are thus spontaneously organizing themselves, conformity to the dominant churches as indispensable to the moral beauty of the whole church? Beautiful as the various constellations are, each in his own region of the heavens, yet that beauty owes much to the single stars that lie between, and form a common medium of union between all. Nay, shall we not admit that, in order that the whole may be complete, and that there may be a society of Christians to represent every sinless phase of Christian liberty, there

must be a Cassiopœia in the church. But let that pass. And let me conclude this argument by simply remarking, that, in harmony with the views which have now been stated, the inspired writers, when they appeal to the beauty of the church, and symbolize it by some beautiful figure, always choose for this purpose some object in which variety is conspicuous, as well as unity. Of such objects, none is more frequently chosen than Jerusalem, as has, indeed, been already illustrated; and whether we look to the Psalms, where the beauty of this city is celebrated in the strains of exalted poetry, or to the Apocalypse, where its plan is laid down in minute description, we may equally discover that, whether it be the Jerusalem that then was, or the New Jerusalem, that filled the mind's eye of the inspired one, he lays much of its beauty in its mountains round about, its bulwarks, its gates, its palaces, its houses, its pavements, its variety in short.

But here, again, our argument returns upon the testimony of Scripture, which has been already considered, and therefore closes for the present.

ON THE ARGUMENT FROM UTILITY.

When we consider that true religion, in its purest and most spiritual expression, consists in the utterances of the heart, the aspirations of the soul to a present God, whom we need not necessarily to go to church in order to meet, but in whom we live and move, and have our being, everywhere and at all times—when we consider that the truest religion, the purest piety, is thus an exercise of the deepest secrecy, we must admit that the church, viewed as an outward institution, exists not so much necessarily and for its own sake, as from expediency and for the sake of those who are members of it—not so much as

a thing essential in the abstract, as that the exercise of religion may be put in harmony with the social nature of man,—in order that the sinful, who are present in the assembly listening to the teaching of the word of God, and yielding to the holy influence, may be converted, and the saints who are present may be confirmed and edified by a fit ministry of the word and a solemn and suitable observance of the worship of God, and while they enjoy communion with God, also enjoy communion with one another. But if such be the main object and idea of a church, it is plain that the form and constitution of that church ought to be suitable to that object. Is an universal uniformity, then, or an unity of spirit in variety of form, most suitable and fit in the present circumstances of the human family? It is not easy to conceive a form and constitution of the church that would be more unfit, in the present day at least, than an universal uniformity over all. Such a state of things would be altogether destructive of a spirit of communion. In fact, it never could be established but by a prevention and suppression of human nature, for to human nature it belongs, in all its present movements, to develope variety. But the very feeling of prevention and restraint is destructive of the spirit of communion. Communion is the heart enlarging itself, and outpouring and uttering truth and love in its own feelings and language. The spirit of communion is a spirit of conscious liberty, of spirituality and choice. It is the enjoyment of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. The idea of restraint is utterly opposed to it. Nay, the very effort to adhere to a certain form, even though it be willingly made, impairs the sweetness, and destroys the feeling of communion. Form is the parent of formality; and, in order to communion, every thing must be left to the heart. But instead of this, where there existed such a rule as an universal unifor-

mity, there would be nothing left to the heart at all. How different is the treatment which the soul disposed for communion receives from God Himself, whether when we come to meet Him in private prayer, or in His word! What liberty in the one, what variety in the other! In prayer we can pour out all our hearts' emotions; and in the Bible, whatever our frame when we open the blessed volume, if we but know where to look, we will find what will comfort us if we are cast down,—what will confirm us if we be doubting,—strengthen us if we be weak,—or if we are overpowered, raise us above the world and ourselves. Far from any thing like a system of universal uniformity, there we find a richly varied revelation, now clothed in language and ideas of the most rural simplicity, now in strains of the most exalted poetry, now in the sequences of the severest logic. The Bible, as a whole, is a volume peculiarly well fitted for cherishing the spirit of communion; and, for that spirit, would not the church, as a whole, be far more suitable likewise, if it displayed somewhat of this variety also, than if it were regulated every where by the police of an universal uniformity? Yet let it never be forgotten, that, as with all the variety in the Bible, there is every where an unity of spirit, so must there ever be in the church.

But while an universal uniformity would be thus altogether uncongenial with the spirit of communion, it would be equally unfavourable in the present day for the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints. This may be easily perceived, by considering for a moment how vast the differences are between man and man, and how different, in consequence, must be the moral and religious appliances which shall prove equally influential to those whose moral position is thus so various. Even in a single nation, where a general amount of civilization prevails

over all, some individuals come into being under predispositions extremely different from others. Others exist under accidental influences, extremely various. And thus, what with variety of natural character, education, rank, in a word, all those differences which constitute and characterize every individual after his own way, such various and different modes of thinking and feeling in reference to religion, such variety of spiritual wants, come into being, that a ministry and mode of worship which would be suited to one could not possibly be equally well suited to another; and, in order to equally influential appliances for the conversion and edification of all, there would need to be a variety corresponding to that which exists in those who are to be the subjects of such appliances. Thus, in some individuals and some nations the intellectual element is far stronger than the taste, than the imagination, than the sensibility; and, to be congenial and profitable to minds of this cast, a church polity and Sabbath service must be comparatively simple and severe. The objects of faith must be presented to the mind as naked as language can leave them; and duty must be enforced by cogent argument, and direct appeal to conscience. In some other individuals and nations again, the pathetic, the imaginative sphere, the sensibility, has the ascendant; and to be equally congenial and profitable with such individuals, or in such a nation, the scheme of church polity and the Sabbath service must be more ornate. The objects of faith must be presented, as much as is lawful, in the form of symbolism, the doctrines illustrated by types and figures, and duty enforced by pathetic appeals.

And, in harmony with this variety in the spiritual wants of His children, we find, in point of fact, that the Head of the Church distributes his spiritual gifts to it. Of this, as has indeed been already shewn, we have a very

fine detail in the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.* There the apostle shews, in a most instructive manner, the unity of the spirit in the variety of gifts, both those which were miraculous, extraordinary, and honourable, and those which are ordinary and necessary to salvation. And what the apostle recounts as descriptive of his day, is, in its spirit at least, equally true of ours ; for, with the apostle, we may call honourable gifts those which do not relate to the salvation of the individual who enjoys them, but which are given to certain persons only for the good of all; and we may call ordinary and necessary gifts those without which we perish, and which we must have in order to inherit eternal life. Among the former we may specify the knowledge of ancient and modern languages, which enables those who enjoy it to consult the original word, to verify the meaning of difficult passages, to improve the versions which have been made already, and to make new ones—the science of sacred antiquities, which is useful and even necessary to him who makes a special study of religion, with a view to devote himself to religious instruction—depth of reasoning power, which is indispensable for exhibiting the truths of the faith before an unbelieving world, and for combating successfully the objections of adversaries—power of speech and eloquence, lively, pressing, persuasive, for preaching the gospel—and many other gifts, by means of which, the illustrious servants of God have not only instructed and built up the church during their life, but have bequeathed, as an inheritance after their death, works, and above all examples, which shall be handed down to the remotest posterity as monuments of their piety and their learning. Now it is to be observed, that these so varied gifts are never, or almost never, found united in one and the same person. He to whom God has given a contemplative spirit,

* 1 Cor. xii.

a taste for study, a capacity for erudition, is in general but ill adapted for active life; and, on the other hand, he who is disposed for active life cannot bear the solitude and the repose of a life spent in study. The learned doctor, the profound theologian, has not always the facility of speech, the unction, the fluency, the urgency necessary to produce, by preaching, a salutary effect; and, on the other hand, the popular and persuasive preacher sometimes wants the qualifications required for handling well the cause of Christianity in the presence of skilful enemies. All have the same end in view, all desire to make known the gospel, all engage in working for the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus, all co-operate for the salvation of men; but each co-operates in this great work in his own particular sphere, and with those personal talents which the Lord has entrusted to him. "There are diversity of gifts, but the same spirit." Moreover, this variety is found even in the ordinary and necessary gifts of the Holy Spirit; and this may at first seem surprising, since, as we have said, the ordinary or necessary gifts are those which are indispensable for salvation, and which no Christian can be without. And how, it may be thought, can there be diversity in the graces which are found in all, and which are common to all? And if there is no Christian without faith, hope, and charity, how is it possible to say that they differ from each other in this respect? Do they not resemble each other here? They do resemble each other. They are one in the divine principle of regeneration and of life, which is in them by the influence of the Holy Spirit; but the element of regeneration and of life, which is the same in all in its essence, is not granted to all in the same degree; and besides, as it has been implanted in a nature which, though equally corrupted in all, offers nevertheless, to the action of grace, obstacles of different kinds,

there results, notwithstanding the unity of the spirit, a great diversity in the operations of grace. Thus, all have a sense of their misery, all, in a greater or less degree, the hope of their salvation, all the peace of God, all the love of Christ, all charity, all humility, all self-renouncement, all the desire of sanctification. But one whose conscience is peculiarly delicate and scrupulous, and who has always before his eyes the sublime ideal of the vocation to which he is called, has much to do in combating with sadness and the spirit of oppression. He tastes only a peace that is partial, and often troubled. Another, on the contrary, who looks less perhaps to himself, and more to the promises of God, enjoys an almost continual assurance of salvation. Peace, serenity, joy, habitually irradiate his brow. In the former, charity manifests itself by an extreme sweetness, by an open and frank benevolence, by great delicacy of feeling in his daily relations with his brethren; while in the latter it manifests itself by zeal, ardour for the salvation of souls, confession of the name of Christ in season and out of season, a public and courageous profession of the truth. One Christian has more humility, another more disinterestedness and self-renouncement. The one is remarkable for his wisdom and his prudence, the other for his energy of character and his spirit of enterprize. The former is distinguished by the seriousness of his life, and his decided tendency to seek sanctification; the latter for the joy with which he makes the greatest sacrifices for the kingdom of Christ. All bear the image of Christ, their Saviour, and their God; but the various features of which this divine image is composed stand out more or less, are more or less deeply traced in different individuals. One and the same liquid may be poured in several vases, but all these vases, which differ in structure and capacity, do not contain it in the same degree, nor

in the same manner. "There is diversity of operations, but it is the same God that worketh all in all." . . . God might indeed (for it only required an exertion of His omnipotence) have impressed on all the souls of the redeemed the same seal of uniformity, and then they had all been tender as St John, ardent as St Peter, profound as Pascal, or spiritual as Augustine. They had all loved and served in the same manner, without any particular shade in their piety and in their love. But how much more is the wisdom of God, which scripture declares to be manifold, manifested and heightened by this multiplicity of forms, under which the work of God is presented to us in his elect. The same breath of the Spirit animates them, the same glory shines in them, the same love constrains them, but they reflect, each in his own way, the rays of grace which warm and purify their souls; and from this infinite variety of characters, and modes of feeling and loving in the members of the heavenly city, there results the most magnificent of concerts, which proclaims, and will proclaim from eternity to eternity, the wisdom, and the power, and the love, and the mercy of God our Saviour, the liberal author, and the inexhaustible source of all these graces.

In this unequal distribution of his gifts, God has had in view not His own glory only, but also the sanctification of His children, whom he prevents thereby from self-exaltation. We are naturally so proud, that if we possessed all the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in the most eminent degree, it is incontestable by the experience which we too often have of ourselves, that we would become vain, self-sufficient, presumptuous, confident in our own strength. But God has so ordered things in His church, that whatever the number and excellence of the gifts with which He has entrusted us, and at whatever period of the Christian life we have arrived, He shews us that

there still remains much to be acquired by us; and in general, He surrounds us in such a manner that we may observe in those of His children whom He has placed near us, either superior lights, or more eminent gifts, or a more lively faith, or a more ardent love, or a more advanced sanctification, so that we may draw, from the examples which we have under our eyes, the inference that there is more than one evangelical quality wanting in us, which we ought to seek after, and that there is more than one virtue, of which grace has deposited the germ in us, wherein there is need that we make immense progress still. Nor is it only in reference to humility that the work of our sanctification gains by this varied distribution of the gifts of the Spirit, but also in reference to charity. This may seem strange at first sight, but nevertheless nothing is more true. Suppose, in fact, that Christians were all enriched with the same graces, to the same degree, and in a perfectly similar manner; as in that case they would be no longer necessary to each other, and would be sufficient for themselves, they would tend to isolation, instead of mutual approximation. Having few wants, and not feeling the necessity of mutual assistance, they would remain strangers to sympathy and to reciprocal services. Finding in themselves that, which in the actual order of providence, they are obliged to seek in others, they would be deprived of that, so precious bond of communication which establishes between them a habitual exchange of counsels and good offices, which make correction and mutual watchfulness a duty, and which render patience, condescension, and all the fruits of love, necessary to their support. But, in the actual state of the church, no Christian can spare his brother, for each in particular has faults in his character, blanks in his Christianity, and each, nevertheless, serves as a prop and an indispensable compliment to

his neighbour. He who has knowledge as his portion, goes to warm his zeal beside him who is fervent in spirit, and he who is fervent in spirit, should not neglect the advice and experience of him to whom God has given prudence. The scribe instructed into the kingdom of Heaven communicates knowledge, and the soul whom he instructs can give him useful lessons of simplicity, humility, and love. The soul solidly built up in the assurance of salvation, and radiant with joy, is the support and encouragement of the soul that is timid and but little assured; but the latter, though little assured as to his peace, but serious in his search after sanctification, can serve to remind the former that the kingdom of God is not peace and joy only, but also righteousness. One might say that the Church of Christ was a vast machine composed of many wheels, of which each fits exactly the other to which it is applied, moves along with it, and concurs in the harmonious movement of the whole; or that it was composed of the stones which enter into a vast edifice, and which, from the base to the roof, placed one above another, bind and mutually sustain each other, though of different forms and magnitudes; or in fine, to make use of the figure which the apostle employs in the passage which has suggested these remarks, that it consisted of the members of the same body, which, though of very various forms and structures, are adjusted to each other, so as to lend a mutual support, and thus co-operate to the harmony, the beauty, the strength, and the agility of the whole body.*

But if thus, in reference even to a single congregation, God was pleased, in the unity of the spirit, to distribute such variety of gifts, and if, in reference even to a single congregation, the fitness and advantages of such variety be obvious, how much more in reference to a whole na-

* See Grandepierre's Sermon on 1 Cor. xii. before referred to.

tion composed of individuals differing in education, temperament, rank, in a word, every social element? And if, in reference to one nation, some variety in the form and manifestation of religion be desirable, both as a help to communion and sanctification of the worshippers, how much more in reference to the whole world, looking to it in the varied state in which it exists in the present day? For, however differing in many particulars, yet all the inhabitants of any one nation are, on a general view, pretty equally advanced to the same pitch of civilization, each in his own sphere. But what vast variety does the world display, viewed as a whole? And if the gospel be designed for the whole world, as is not denied, is it not plain that the Sabbath service, and the details of church constitution, which are most fit for one place, cannot be equally fit for another, which, both for the purposes of correction, edification, and communion, would require appliances of other forms? Could the Sabbath service, calculated to engage and enlighten the soul of an inhabitant of London or Paris, be equally suited to an inhabitant of Timbuctoo, or a native of New Holland? If it be the object of all religious exercises, to produce a certain effect upon the worshipper, as for instance to induce him to devote himself to the glory of God and a holy life, is it not obvious that the motives which are presented to the worshippers, must be such as will affect them? And in order to this, is it not essential that they shall not sound altogether strange to the minds of those to whom they are addressed, but bear some relation to their moral state; in a word, is it not desirable that the truth should be exhibited on one side here, on another side there, and that the unity of the faith and spirit of the gospel should be manifested in such variety as may be expected to convince, convert, comfort, and sanctify those to whom it is addressed? Looking to the argument in reference to the

question of fitness and utility, there are certainly no limits to the variety which is desirable, provided only that there be no schism, no division, no alienation of affection, no reciprocal recrimination between Christians. There are, indeed, limits to the variations which may exist, but for such limits we must look to a higher principle than mere utility. And such a principle there is. Whatever the variety of form and manifestation resorted to, the unity of the faith, the unity of the spirit, must ever be preserved. Nothing is more directly contrary to the whole spirit of revelation, than that "a man should lie for God," or "do evil that good may come." The argument from utility, however worthy of being considered, must always be kept within the limits which an uncompromising love of the truth prescribes.

THE ARGUMENT FROM THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE.

Scripture, reason, conscience, grace, woven into prayers, praises, readings, sermons, sacraments,—such are the various means supplied to us for attaining to the possession of the religion which the Holy Spirit imparts. And are they not sufficient? Yes. What man is there who truly desires to live by faith, and lead a virtuous and pious life, but feels, and willingly admits, that the means of grace are amply sufficient.

But if it be granted that they are sufficient, or even if it be granted that they are all we have, it must be granted also, that around those central truths which are plainly revealed, and which are held in common by all evangelical churches, there must be a variety of views respecting lesser truths which are not plainly revealed, or about which good men differ; it must be granted, that, in the unity of true religion, a great variety of views

must be embraced. For not any one of the four influences which have been named exerts such an agency, that it conducts all men to the very same results. On the contrary, each of them, in each individual on whom it operates, produces its own results,—results which, though they may all be harmonious with truth,—all the varied forms of truth,—all views on different sides and aspects of that mighty pillar of truth which sustains the moral universe, are yet always harmonious with the individuality of the person acted upon likewise; so that, in detail, there must ever be as many actual results in thought and feeling, as there are individuals affected. And where there is a variety in thought and feeling, there must ever necessarily be a corresponding variety in language, if the language used is to be equally true in all cases. Among all who hold the Bible, there must, indeed, be an unity even in language,—to an immense extent,—yes, to the full extent of the whole word of God itself;—a most delightful consideration. And over all who are duly impressed by the means of grace, there must be a beautiful unity of spirit, significantly expressed by the term *a Christian spirit;* but, within the compass of that unity, there cannot but be a considerable variety in more obscure details.

Neither reason, nor conscience, nor grace, nor all combined, are calculated to give rise to an universal uniformity in views and opinions on such points as are not dogmatically laid down, but can only be obtained inferentially from the word of God. These agencies are, indeed, calculated to give rise to a certain uniformity, but it is an uniformity in moral effects, rather than in opinions, an uniformity in turning men from darkness to light, from the service of Satan unto God, that they may obtain the forgiveness of their sins, and an inheritance among those that are sanctified by faith that is in Christ. In reference to inferential opinions, no more is uniformity to

be looked for than uniformity in original character or gifts of the Spirit. There are no elements to produce such an uniformity. On the contrary, a variety of views and opinions on such matters is surely to be expected, from the elements that are brought into play. Thus, as to reason and conscience,—are there not arguments on all sides of every point that is justly questionable? And as to grace,—the principle of variety in the unity of the work of regeneration is so completely recognised by all thoughtful men, that those are always censured by the enlightened, who lay down cases of individual experience as models for all. It is universally admitted that the influences of the Spirit are suited in every case to the particular circumstances and spiritual wants of the individuals called to experience them. And what are the fruits of the Spirit? Are they declared anywhere to consist in uniformity in all views and opinions among the true followers of Jesus? No; the fruit of the Spirit is declared to be "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." And when are we said to be neither barren nor unfruitful in *the knowledge* of our Lord Jesus Christ? is it when we have all exactly the same view of every point of church polity and abstract doctrine? No; it is when we "give all diligence to add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity; for he that lacketh these things is blind."*

And as it is with reason, conscience, and grace, so is it with Scripture. So long as the human mind continues to be what it is, or (as this is an outlook longer than we need contemplate) so long, at all events, as we continue under our probation, there cannot but be a variety of

* 2 Peter i. 8.

interpretations of Scripture, if interpretations are to be permitted at all. In all that belongs to the essentials of evangelical religion, indeed, there ought to be, and there may well be, an unity of interpretation among all pious readers of the word of God; but in many points which, being of secondary importance, are not peremptorily revealed, and can only be arrived at by comparison and inference, there cannot but be a variety of views and opinions. The Bible is altogether framed to admit of this. Nay, suppose it were one of the laws under which we use our minds, that different pious individuals, contemplating the same subject, arrive at different views, not so much because some wander from the truth, while others arrive at it, as because each views it only on the side next himself, and so that, though there eventually results a great variety of views, yet they are all true so far as they go, and all admit of being harmonized with each other; and suppose that this variety of view in different individuals, or this appliance of truth to the individual—this individualization of truth—were a necessary thing, in order to our living a life holy and to the glory of God, it is not possible to conceive a revelation admitting better of the action of such a law than that which we possess in Scripture. Within the unity of the sacred volume a most wonderful variety is contained. Notices, more or less ample, are given of the will of God, and the duty and destiny of man, from the creation of the world to the consummation of all things; and under the unity of the same inspiration, all these notices were penned by a variety of different characters, in different periods of the world's history, separated from each other by many ages. Of all volumes of the same size, the Bible is by far the most varied. Yet all this variety is embraced by the unity of the truth. Unbelievers, indeed, who have taken up the volume with a view to disprove its preten-

sions, have thought that they have found many contradictions among its differing statement. But others, better disposed, have found the work of reconciliation an easy task. And it is the opinion of all Christendom, that, vastly varied as the contents of the Bible are, still there is not a single contradiction within its boards. Here, then, in reference to the Bible as a whole, we have a beautiful illustration of what must always be looked for in interpretations of its more obscure passages, an unity of spirit and truth in vast variety of forms and statements. And here the reader is requested to observe, in keeping with the statement which has just been made, that we owe the maintenance of this unity amid all the variety, to those who, admitting the variety, and regarding every statement they find as true, address themselves to the inquiry whether the varying statements may not be reconciled and brought to an unity of spirit and truth.

Now, what is true of the sacred volume as a whole, is true also of every doctrinal passage or text in it, when expanded in the minds of a variety of readers. The text as it stands in the Bible is an unity. It is God's truth. But no sooner is it brought home to the minds of a variety of individuals, and identified with their personal thoughts and feelings, than that unity is invariably expanded into a variety. All are at one respecting the words as they stand in the page of inspiration. All assent to their truth as they stand in the Bible. But one reader looks to the truth which he contemplates on one side, another looks to it on another, and each developes it on the side he is looking at; and thus, as the result of the commenting on any one text by a variety of different hands, especially if they are in different periods of spiritual life, or are of different temperaments of mind, we

cannot but have a great variety of shades both in views and opinions.

Now it is a question in sacred criticism, whether there be not in point of fact within the unity of each single text of scripture, involved in embryo as it were, as leaves, flowers, and fruit are in the seed, a great variety of truths and doctrines? It has been maintained by ingenious and spiritually-minded men, that every passage in the word of God, does really import all that can be got out of it; and much of our most popular preaching is built upon the liberties which this system of interpretation alone can warrant. But let this pass. Without countenancing such an opinion, it is certain that if we but grant to scripture any other meanings besides its literal one, we must grant that these others can be brought out, only in the form of a variety of meanings. It may, indeed, be reasonably expected, that while all intelligent readers of the Bible are labouring to come at the immediate or literal signification of any passage, almost all will agree at last. We see interpreters do so in reference to the classics, and no reason appears why they should not do so in reference to the Bible, especially the New Testament, if they would only confine themselves to the same strict rules of grammatical construction, and the usage of language. But so soon as we admit that, besides its primary signification, a passage in scripture has also derivative or secondary significations, then what is there to determine these significations but the peculiar tone of the interpreter's religious taste, with which, as has been shewn, grace usually acts in harmony; and what is there then to limit these interpretations but his judgment? But taste and judgment vary remarkably among all, even the best of men. If, then, we admit a single secondary signification of the language of scripture at all, we must admit a variety of such significations. We can, indeed,

acquire them only in the form of variety. An absolute unity in such a case is impossible, except when one person only is engaged in the work of commenting.

Are secondary significations then to be admitted at all? Every thing must depend on the answer to this question. Now, that many passages of scripture have such significations is certain. For in the New Testament we find our Saviour and the apostles thus interpreting many passages of the Old. Moreover, in the passages thus spiritualized by them, there is nothing which would warrant us in assuming that they are the only passages in the whole scriptures which admit of such a treatment. On the contrary, the passages alluded to are a class to which many besides themselves plainly belong. The only question, therefore, is whether we (the not inspired) are warranted to interpret the word of God as those did, who, being inspired, could not err.

But be this as it may, the thing is done; secondary means are insisted on very extensively; and that not within the limits which the example of the inspired writers would warrant. If a text can only be manipulated so as to give agreeable play to the religious emotions, such a manipulation is thought to be warrantable. In many districts of the country, indeed, such a method of handling the word of God is regarded as the surest test of piety, and it commands a high degree of popular admiration. There is, therefore, no likelihood of its soon ceasing. We must, therefore, reason upon it as a thing which exists, and which, right or wrong, will continue to exist at least until that time (seemingly far distant) arrive when persons of mere temperamental religion shall have a greater regard for the word of God than their own prepossessions, and cease to compact their own systems and twist scripture to the support of their own impressions. Meantime, while the use of scrip-

ture continues to be what it is, it may be urged upon those of this Cocceian school, that it is plainly a matter of Christian obligation on them, for it is a matter of sheer justice that they who indulge in such a mode of interpretation should allow others to do the same; that they who have adopted a method of expounding the word of God which, when generally practised, must inevitably give rise to great variety of interpretation, should tolerate that variety which they themselves unite in causing, and rather be disposed to believe that that variety is still embraced by the unity of the truth, than to maintain that their own view is exclusively the right one. Let such free interpreters, bold in affirming, only refrain from denying, and but little evil will result, comparatively speaking. Positive views, in interpretation, are always much better than negative. For, while each of several interpreters says only—I find such a meaning or meanings in the text,—it is still possible that all the meanings thus found may be in the text. Though they vary from each other, it is still conceivable that they may be all harmonized with each other, and may be shewn to be all embraced by the unity of the faith. But when each of several interpreters says,—I find this meaning and this only in the text, and all other views are false,—then here there is downright error, possibly in all who interpret and vary from each other, certainly in all but one; and this is surely a deplorable state of things, a state of things growing worse too as the students of God's word increase, for, since each maintains his own opinion, and contradicts the opinions of all the others, opinions and contradictions increase with numbers, and who is to decide where the truth lies?

The Church of Rome pretends to an infallible guidance in the interpretation of scripture; but every body that has inquired into this matter knows, that if there be any thing at all special in the case of this Church, it is that

the resolution of any difficulty which she gives to any of the faithful who inquires, is practically nothing more, and can be nothing more, than the view of the individual priest who is consulted. Even on a passage discussed by the Fathers, it is still the individual priest who interprets, for the Fathers differ, and the priest must choose. His deliverance may, therefore, possibly be much farther from the truth than the inquirer's own idea, for the position of a Romish priest is peculiarly unfavourable for discovering and maintaining the unsophisticated truth of God's word. But even though instead of an individual, and possibly an ignorant and self-interested priest, the interpretations which the Church of Rome gives to those who inquire were the views of the whole Church, even supposing that there were that consent among the Fathers which the Church of Rome strangely asserts that there is, still such interpretations were things of mere authority after all, and, unless they satisfied the reason and conscience of the inquirer, they would never do for intelligent Christian men. A few long-tormented spirits, indeed, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, might be glad to lay hold of them, or of any thing which would be a sort of haven to them, and save them from farther thought. But, in order to true religion and a well grounded faith, reason and conscience must be enlightened and satisfied. Mere authority, to which there is no response in the inner man, will never do. An appeal is never made to authority, but Truth feels that virtue is gone out of her. If the perusal of the Bible be allowed at all, and in reference to any enlightened people it were as idle as it would be injurious to think of preventing it, the right of private judgment as to the meaning of scripture must be granted. And if so, then variations must be tolerated also. They are altogether unavoidable.

But, in reference to these variations (always supposing them not to contradict one another), since they thus

appear to be an unavoidable consequence of Christian liberty, and resemblances to the word of God itself, why should we act in a spirit diametrically opposite to that in which we act in reference to the analogous variations of the Bible itself. When the apostles, Paul and James, differ in their epistles, there is but one desire among all Christians, and that is to harmonize their statements, to shew that the truth which they discuss is one, and that the apparent contradiction arises all from this, that they are looking at different sides of the truth, and so give different views of it. And this is plainly the right spirit in which such variations should be treated; and here and wherever this spirit operates, the result is what it ought to be. There is harmony and the right understanding of the passages compared. But when two moderns differ, then commonly their respective adherents try only to shew how widely they differ, and to make out, if possible, that they contradict each other, which, likely enough they do, since people are always going out of their way to deny what others believe, as well as to maintain what they themselves affirm. Now, why this? Why not bear towards all evangelical writers, when they appear to differ, the spirit of reconciliation which we bear towards the inspired writers when they appear to differ. There is this of dissimilarity, indeed, between the two cases, that with respect to the inspired writers, we are sure that however they may at first sight seem to differ, yet they never can actually come to a contradiction of each other. With respect to uninspired writers, on the other hand, we know, for certain, that they may contradict each other. Still the two cases are parallel in all their leading features; and no good reason can be given why we should not try to reconcile uninspired writers when we see them co-operating towards the glory of God and a holy life, as we do the inspired writers. May not uninspired writers possibly be

at one, though at first sight they seem to differ, as well as inspired writers? If faith assure us that the inspired are always at one, should not charity induce us to hope and to believe, if we may, that the piously disposed, though not inspired, are at one too, though at first sight, and on the outside of their words there may seem to be an opposition. It is not without good reason that we should seek to be guided by such a spirit of reconciliation; for if we act thus in reference to such matters, then, even though we should never arrive at the true meaning of the passage which we inquire into, nor learn which of all who have commented on it is nearest the truth, still our research has not been in vain. We have not, indeed, discovered its true meaning. But the very obscurity in it which this ill success implies, intimates that it is not of the essence of faith, so that we may be saved, without knowing its meaning, while in the mean time it has become an occasion for the exercise of our charity, and so has been made to minister to its growth. And charity we know to be such a grace, that when prophecies have failed, and tongues have ceased, and knowledge has passed away, charity never faileth,—such a grace, that if we be without it, though we understood all mysteries, we are nothing.*

It is delightful to think that all Christians are at one as to the Scripture itself. Let even a long paragraph be but from the word of God, it is immediately assented to by all as true. Ought not this fact, then, to induce all truly pious men to keep as much as possible to the word of God, and both to avoid those self-willed transformations of Scripture language, and those adventurous extractions of questionable significations from particular texts, which, if independently true, may be proved to be so on their own grounds, and need not be argued out of a text which seems to say nothing about the matter, and which,

* 1 Cor. xiii.

after all, are perhaps of no practical value, though sure to raise a controversy? And ought it not also to induce the considerate to refrain from those accommodations of particular passages of Scripture to serve purposes for which it is certain they never were intended, and which they know, before they use them, will never be assented to by those whom they address. Ought we not also to refrain from that scrutiny after hidden meanings to which no better principle than curiosity prompts, and over which no higher faculty than imagination presides?

What a fine example of reverence for the word of God does the evangelist John give us in the conclusion of his gospel. Peter, having been called upon to follow Jesus, asks the Redeemer what shall this man do, alluding to John, who was also present. The Saviour answers, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" These words were remembered; and having excited the curiosity of the apostles, they began to interpret them; and we learn from him to whom they related, that the prevalent view of the interpreters was that John should never die. But how does John himself resolve the question? What is the specimen of interpretation which John himself gives? In answer to all their speculations, he only says, "Jesus said not he shall not die, but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee." He merely repeats the Saviour's words, altogether refraining from all unholy curiosity as to their signification, and consenting to wait until the course of Providence and of Grace should unfold their meaning. And I cannot but think that there is a good lesson here as to the principle of interpretation generally. If John had such veneration for the words of Christ that he does not even venture to transform them into words of his own, ought not we to entertain something of the like veneration, and to refrain from indulging in endless and peculiar comments and

paraphrases of our own? At all events, since we are all agreed to receive every word of scripture, since, in this most essential point, there is unity amongst us all, ought we to split upon our own words, our own interpretations, our own creations? Are we safe in doing so? Is there any likelihood of the gain of truth in such a case being so great as to compensate the loss of charity? What if it should at last appear, that, in like manner as the course of Providence has been framed to a certain extent just in order to prove us, so has the word of God been left in many parts indefinite just in order to be the wider field for charity and humility, and to try us whether we shall be satisfied with the word of God in the form in which He has been pleased to give it; and whether we shall be actuated towards each other by a spirit of exclusive self-esteem and self-rightness, or by mutual esteem and Christian forbearance. This were a theme not incapable of support. Certain it is, that it were better to be without interpretations than without charity. For, without interpretations, the word of God is plain in all points necessary to salvation; and, therefore, so far as the word is concerned, salvation is attainable without a commentary, but salvation is not attainable without charity. So long as we want charity, we still are nothing, whatever our gifts besides.

But while truth admits of this variety of expression, let it not be forgotten that there are also errors in religion, grievous errors, anxiously to be avoided; and in reference to which all means of persuasion are to be used to convert those who hold them from the error of their ways; a work rendered extremely difficult by the very circumstance which brings these errors into being. For these errors are not in any case the legitimate offspring of enlightened reason, and do not, in any case, maintain their credit on the ground of reason. They are always the off-

spring of self or of selfishness, making use of reason to serve its own purposes. And, therefore, are only to be eradicated by a self-renouncement, which argument, addressed by another, cannot often effect. But here let us illustrate this in a few particulars.

It is certain that all Christians ought ever to be at one in what is in Scripture emphatically called "the faith." And, with regard to the substance of this faith, it is certain that it is "the faith once delivered to the saints."* It is also certain, that when this faith is opposed or subverted every Christian ought to contend for it. If he do not, he does not act in the spirit of the wisdom which is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, &c.† But to come to an instance. Our Saviour, on a fit occasion, put to His disciples the question, Whom do men say that I am? and having received from the Apostle Peter for answer, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," he added with striking emphasis, after a blessing bestowed on the apostle himself who had given utterance to the glorious creed, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell shall never prevail against it." And to all this, as to matter of plain revelation and trust-worthy history, every Christian feels himself bound to give his cordial assent. Up to this point there is an absolute unity of faith among all professing Christians. All, without exception, receive the words of Christ as the very truth of the matter. But no sooner is interpretation set to work on these words, than a variety of views begin to manifest themselves. And, referring to the history of the church, we find here, as in reference to every thing else which is the product of the human mind, error abounding—error on both hands. But yet not all error. We find truth filling the middle region, and with this pleasing feature too, that it is in the middle that the

* Jude i. 3, 4. † James iii. 17.

breadth and the beauty lie; while in the extremes, the regions of error, both on the right and the left, all is narrow and deformed. But what are the errors of interpretation here? To find them we need hardly go to history. It is enough to remember that the church is a social institution, and that, in reference to all social institutions, human beings have various tastes, the extremes being a demand, on the one hand, for an absolute monarchy, an unmodified deference to authority; on the other, for a pure democracy, a supremacy of the individual will and judgment. And we may rest assured that these two prepossessions, as our Saviour's words give occasion to their play, will determine two extreme interpretations of His words. Accordingly we find, in point of fact, that he who is all for authority, trusting to the semblance of literality in his interpretation of the word of God as his warrant, daringly maintains, that the rock on which our Saviour said that He would build His church was not the fact of which the apostle made confession, but the Apostle Peter himself, who is therefore to be regarded as the primate of the primitive church, and the first bishop of Rome! and that the reason why the gates of hell have never prevailed against the church is, just because it has been built all along on the authority of an uninterrupted succession of primates, of whom Peter was the first! Those in the other extreme, on the contrary, who are all opposed to the exercise of authority,—the purely democratic,—not only repudiate such an interpretation of this passage, as they well may, but from the fact, that our Saviour uttered His chief denunciations against the Scribes and Pharisees, those in authority in His day, and chose illiterate Galilean fishermen to be the ministers of His religion, maintain, that neither ought there to be a regular order and institution of a standing ministry, nor ought those who engage in the ministry of the Gospel to possess

any erudition! Taking events for principles, and the letter for the spirit, they do not scruple to maintain, that that which derived all its glory from its strangeness, and its strange suitableness to the moment, and owed all its success to God's omnipotence, should be taken as the type and model of what ought to be in all times. Making no difference between the capacity of the human mind for the work of evangelizing, then, when it was guided by the immediate suggestions of an infallible inspiration, and invested with authority by the power of working miracles, and now when it is left to a ministry, sustained by natural acquirements, and the ordinary gifts of the Spirit only, they are not ashamed to maintain (claiming as their warrant some such promise of Scripture as this, "Seek and ye shall find") that, though the whole of true religion is to be found in the Bible only, a volume written in Hebrew, Chaldee, and Greek, full of allusions in every page to the times and people it was first addressed to, yet ought there to be no erudition in those who are to explain it, and minister religion from it, nor ought any one, on any such pretension of superior fitness, and still less any one, on any such pretension as lawful calling, ordination, or the like, presume to expect obedience, or exercise authority in the church. Now these are extremes, which all truth and virtue have gone out of; and, though a full toleration is to be granted to those who hold them, yet the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, and every kind of rational means of persuasion, is to be adopted to persuade such persons, if possible, to abandon these extreme and unscriptural views, at which even common sense revolts, and to embrace some one or other of the more truthful views which lie between, and within the limits of evangelical liberty. These views are very various. The Church of England, for instance, lying within the limits of the truth on the side of monarchy,

that side where the Church of Rome lies beyond, lays no small stress on the personal offices and gifts of the apostles, and on apostolic succession and episcopal ordination. Independent churches, on the other hand, lying within the limits of the truth on the side of those who lie beyond it on the democratic side, lay all the stress upon the apostolic doctrines; while the Presbyterian Church lies between, and neither disregards orders, nor undervalues doctrines. In a word, looking at the variety of opinions on the subject of church polity which have arisen in pious minds, acting under the consciousness of Christian liberty, and desiring to interpret justly the words of Christ, it is to be observed, that some have come to the conclusion that an individual congregation, assembling for worship in one place, embraces all the elements of a complete church; that, as to polity and government, all such churches ought to be congregational, and independent of each other; and that their mutual intercourse ought to be that of brotherhood, and advice merely. Others, again, have come to the conclusion that each congregation, instead of being viewed as complete in itself, ought rather to be viewed as a part of a whole, a branch of a tree, a member of a body; and that the intercourse between church and church, besides being that of brotherhood and advice, ought also to be that of judicature, composed partly of clergy, partly of laity, assembled in parity. Others, again, have decided, that this episcopacy, instead of being composed on a principle of parity, and of clerical members only in part, ought to be wholly clerical, and organized on a principle of Prelacy. And while we thus obtain, from good and enlightened men, all this variety of opinion, we find that each is fully as much satisfied as another with the views to which he has been led. Each is full of the social, scriptural, and spiritual advantages of his own ecclesias-

tical system. Each is thankful that he is of his own persuasion. Meantime, the apostle Paul says, let every man be thoroughly persuaded in his own mind. And really, if, with the apostle, we grant this liberty of persuasion, and but divest ourselves of party spirit and hereditary or personal partialities, and look at these different systems of polity in their spirit rather than in their external forms, at the features wherein they agree rather than at those wherein they differ, and especially if we look how each of them is calculated to promote the piety and holy living of him who is conscientiously attached to it, we will not see reason for *insisting* that things should be otherwise than we find that, under such guidance of the Divine Spirit as the church enjoys, they have actually attained. We will not see reason for believing, that, at the present moment, and in the present state of society, they could possibly be brought to be otherwise than they are—always except as to the matter of mutual charity and love, to the want of which we may easily trace all the evils which now distract and depress the church, and prevent a more orderly and beautiful frame of things from arising.

Again, and still in reference to the question of our Saviour and Peter's confession, we find, as to doctrine, just as to polity, an error on each extreme beyond the range of the truth altogether, and also, the truth variously expressed, lying between. Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;" language which we are plainly to understand in the same way as the Jews did, and we learn their understanding of it from the fact, that they charged our Saviour with maintaining that He was equal with God;*—not that they might believe in Him, but that they might charge Him with blasphemy, and put Him to death. Now, Peter was a Jew,

* John v. 18.

and would, no doubt, use the expression, "Son of God," in the same sense as his countrymen did. Plainly, therefore, when he says, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," he adopts their accusation as his faith. And thus, in so far, at least, as the second person is concerned, we find here the declaration of the doctrine of the trinity. Nor are these words of Peter the only form in which this doctrine may be expressed. For while every one must admit that the human mind cannot fully conceive, nor human language truly describe, the whole mystery of the incarnation, it is certain that many books have been written on the subject, many discourses delivered, all of which are true and orthodox, and yet not one of them, quite similar to another, either in the definitions or illustrations made use of. Here, as elsewhere, the truth has been clothed in great variety of forms, and is so clothed every day, and still it does not cease to be the truth.

But beyond the range of the truth here, also, we have an error on each hand. On the one hand, we have the error of tritheism, in which the unity of the Godhead is lost in descriptions, in which the three persons of the Godhead are represented as consulting together, and discussing in eternity, the salvation of man, in language such as would be used by three finite separate individuals in such a case. On the other hand, we find the doctrine of the trinity lost under a mistaken view of the unity of the Godhead, and giving rise to a heresy, which, though it be a grievous error in itself, is yet but an element of a far greater, when it forms part of a system which repudiates the whole of sacrificial religion, and derides the doctrine of the atonement; and in doing so, rejects the gospel and libels humanity as insensate, while it desires and professes to honour it. For, if humanity in all its variety, has shewn one invariable state of feeling and con-

viction, it is that which testifies in favour of the need of sacrifice to atone for guilt.

In like manner, were we to take any other elementary principle of the Christian economy uttered by our Saviour, one relating to worship, for instance, instead of polity and doctrine, we should find a recurrence of the same phenomena, we should find error on both hands, and truth between. We should also find that that truth is limited, not by the words in which it is expressed, so much as by the errors which bound it. Thus our Saviour, conversing with the woman of Samaria, took occasion to utter the great principle that, under the gospel-dispensation, worship should not be confined either to Jerusalem or Mount Gerizin; but that whoso worshippeth the Father acceptably, must henceforth worship Him in spirit and in truth. From this we learn, therefore, that in order to be truly Christian,—in order to be acceptable to the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, all worship must be spiritual and true. But good men have formed various opinions as to the particular forms, seasons, and places of worship, which represent and embody this requisite most completely; and each worshipper finds his own ritual most spiritual and truth-inspiring; and each regards his own as that which is to be gathered from the analogy of faith, and believes it to be that which is most congenial to the will of God. As the extremes which lie beyond the range of truth on both hands, we may mention on the one hand, that which a priesthood, ever actuated by the same principles, tends to construct, a system where all is a mysterious symbolism,—which says to the laity, "Touch not, taste not, handle not,"—all a mumbling in an unknown tongue, which none can utter but the priest, and which, therefore, tends directly to serve the purpose of maintaining the exclusive privileges and ghostly supremacy of that order. Not

that we would place such an economy of worship beyond the range of truth, because it was well fitted to serve the purposes of the priesthood, if it were not otherwise objectionable. But every one who grants the exclusive authority of the written word, must admit that such a ritual as has been alluded to, is often and particularly condemned in the word of God, as one composed of beggarly elements, suitable, indeed, to the infancy of the church, but contrary to the intention of God, with respect to the Christian era. As the limit, on the other hand, we may mention such a system as that of the Quakers, who admit no rites whatever. Not that the mere consideration of unfitness for the purposes of general worship, would warrant an exclusion of such a ritual (or rather absence of all ritual), from the range of true and spiritual worship. But such a system is contradictory of the authority of the New Testament Scriptures. For there we find baptism and the Lord's Supper instituted, and commanded to be perpetuated; and we see the primitive Christians joining in prayer and praise, and preaching in their assemblies. Between these limits, however, what beautiful variety is conceivable, and how little is there in the word of God to forbid any of our evangelical rituals?

Let it also be remarked, that while the church system of the Romanist and of the Quaker, and the doctrine of the Unitarian, are placed beyond the pale of the church, no judgment is made respecting the ultimate destiny of any individual, who may belong to any one or other of these communions. That is a point, which it does not belong to this treatise so much as to touch. It has, indeed, been just affirmed, that the Unitarian rejects the gospel. And let him see to that and to its consequences. But here it belongs to us only to state the melancholy fact.

THE ARGUMENT FROM THE LIMITED NATURE OF THE HUMAN MIND.

In an early page of this work, * I have endeavoured to shew that, independently of the testimony both of reason and of Scripture as to the nature of true Christian unity, and, indeed, antecedently to the application of these faculties to the consideration of its principles, we are to expect, as a natural result of the universal love of order which actuates the human mind, a general prepossession in favour of universal uniformity in religion, and that, even though such an uniformity should be wholly inappropriate or unattainable, in reference to such a society as the church. We have also endeavoured to shew, in opposition to this prepossession, that not universal uniformity, but unity of spirit in variety of form, is a state of things in the church, which is both suitable to such an all-embracing institution, and is supported by the analogy of nature, and by considerations of moral beauty, and of fitness and utility. And this being done, it might, perhaps, be allowable now to infer, from what has been already advanced, that, in so far as reason can decide such a question, an evangelical unity in faith and love in variety of different communions, is a form of the church worthy of being regarded as both reasonable and right, in reference to the present era at least. But there is yet one other consideration more urgent than any of those which have been noticed, on which a few words may, perhaps, be well bestowed before we close. I allude to the argument arising from the limited powers of the human mind.

It will be admitted, that that is very reasonable which necessarily springs out of the very operations of reason,

* See p. 93.

and which is unavoidable, if reason is to be allowed any play at all. Now, this is truly the case in reference to the point at issue. If reason is to have any sway in religion at all, an absolute unity, an universal agreement, as to creed, ritual, discipline, polity, in a word, an uniformity over all, is an utter impossibility as matters now stand. Where all minds are impressed by the same primary truths, and guided by the same spirit, and animated by the same affections, there may, nay, there must be, unity of spirit among all. There must be a beautiful harmony, both in faith and feeling among all. But in order that there should be an absolute uniformity,—an universal agreement in all things,—it would be necessary that there should be no such thing as individuality among men. It would be necessary that the same quantity and the same quality of feeling, taste, and reason, should be found equally in all men. And in order that all, while they agreed among themselves, should also agree with the truth, it would be necessary that that ray of universal reason, which, as from a higher source, descends into the breast of every man, should continue in him in its native purity, unmodified and unindividualized by the soul into which it entered, and where it was destined to dwell. Were this the condition of human nature, then we might have absolute unity. But this is far from being the condition of our nature as it actually is. In every man, reason and conscience are individualized; and, in order to be of any use to man as an individual, they require to be so. But hence it necessarily comes to pass, that when truth is entertained in the individual mind, and enwoven with individual feeling,—as all truth, truly believed, ever must be,—then, forthwith, though the unity of the truth may be still preserved, variety of form and utterance must unavoidably manifest itself likewise.

The human mind is instinct with self, and desires to

make every thing its own. But it never regards anything as its own till it sees it in its own light, and through the medium of its own feelings. And as this light and these feelings are different in different minds, it thus comes to pass that one and the same truth is ultimately clothed in a variety of expressions by different minds. Nay, in many cases, though the same words be still preserved by all who are in communication with each other, still, even when using the same expressions, each is attaching his own peculiar meaning to the language he uses, so that even before variety of expression begins, there is often no small variety in feelings and opinions. Moreover, it is vain to suppose that the same religious opinions can be impressed on all, or maintained in all, by requiring from all the same formula in words. Not less various than the political opinions of a large assembly of electors, who all unite in swearing allegiance to the same sovereign, according to the formula read to them, may be the religious opinions of an assembly, all of whom may use the same confession of faith. Nothing but love will ever preserve the unity of the faith. Mere words generally tend rather to generate strife. Very little is done either for the cause of truth or of holiness, when any number of men, however great, have been brought to agree to use the same confession of faith, the same forms of speech, if in this alone they are agreed.

There is, however, only a small class of truths in reference to which this agreement in the use of words is practicable. In reference to truths in general, when once they have been truly believed and appropriated by a variety of minds, they can only be announced by those who hold them, or be handed from one to another in a variety of statements. All such statements, indeed, if their authors be ingenuous, and have good lights, will still belong to the unity of the truth, to the unity of the faith. But

there will unavoidably be also a certain variety, which, even in reference to those who most closely resemble each other, will still be discoverable, if not to the eye of criticism, yet to the moral taste, inasmuch as one person will be found to prefer one statement, another another, each finding something congenial to himself in the one, which he does not find in the other, and thus demonstrating that there is something in the one, which there is not in the other.

An absolute unity of view, in a variety of individuals, is altogether unattainable. Differing views of the same thing, when the individuals contemplating them differ, are altogether unavoidable. This variety is the very fruit of reason's growth. Nor is it otherwise with the fruits of the spirit. In the unity of His influence, there is an ample diversity of gifts and ministries, as has been already shewn.* Variety in religious views, arises as necessarily from the influence of divine grace, as from the exercise of natural reason. But let it be well remarked, that in all such cases, if reason be really acting well, and grace be really grace, nothing more results than what has been described. There are, indeed, different views. But they are only different views of the same thing. It is still the truth that is seen. Only, one mind views it on one side, another on another, and each expands and fills his mind with that view of it which he takes. He looks only to what he sees.

Now, from hence (it must be admitted), it follows that the opinions of all are faulty—faulty on both sides, both defective and redundant. They are defective, because they are formed out of a partial and imperfect view of truth. They are redundant, because they attach as much and build as much upon this imperfect view, as if it were the whole truth. But still, though all these views are

* See p. 331.

thus faulty, there is truth in them all. And if the whole truth of any matter is ever to be attained by men at all, it will be by viewing all the disinterested conscientious opinions of sound-thinking Christian men with candour, and selecting, or at least learning something from each. And if the Bible were lost, the best way to replace its most important revelations, would be to take all the creeds of the evangelical churches, and all the treatises which approve themselves to the truly pious, and mark what was common to them all, and put that down as the sum of the truths of the first class, the undisputed revelation, the unity of the faith. But this done, would it be right to reject or neglect all the remainder? Though we had it in our power, would there be any use in attempting to extinguish all variations in matters of indifference? Why annihilate that variety which it would be the first fruits of conscience and Christian liberty to reproduce? What is it after all, if it be evangelical, but the truth variously expressed and viewed on different sides? And who is he that shall condemn it, if it be based on revelation, and be but the development of it, and if it testify its truthfulness to the heart of him who believes it, by ever pointing to the glory of God, and leading to a holy life?

If we adopt the opinion generally maintained, that variety in religious opinions, and in all that relates to the church, has increased since the Reformation, this is the strongest of all arguments in favour of the principle, that such variety, so long as it is embraced by the unity of the truth, is not in opposition either to the religious, moral, and intellectual development of the human mind, or to a supreme veneration for the word of God. For it is universally admitted, that, since the Reformation, the human mind has been experiencing a glorious enlargement. Since that epoch also, for the first time for many ages,

the supreme authority of scripture has been recognised, and the contents of the sacred volume have come to be generally known. Now, if along with this veneration for the word of God, we find variety in religious opinions, rather increasing than diminishing, are we not to infer that such variety is a fruit of light rather than of darkness, especially if, along with it, we find the unity of the plainly revealed truth preserved more entire also. And that this really is the case, I am persuaded every one will admit, who candidly compares the variations which the Church of Rome generated during the middle ages, with those which the churches of the Reformation have developed since. In those of the Church of Rome very generally all unity is lost. The different systems advanced by different individuals, and followed by different sects in that denomination, stood in direct contrast to each other. There was no bond of intellectual unity among them at all. Submission to the Roman pontiff was many a time the only feature that was common to them. But this cannot be called a feature of intellectual agreement and unity: for it is a matter of authority at best, and was, in too many cases, plainly a matter of necessity, and in too many others of pure selfishness. Since the Reformation, however, in the midst of all that variety which the religious world has displayed, and, embracing it all, the unity of evangelical religion is maintained in the creed, not only of every national church, but of almost every sect. The variety lies almost wholly in secondary doctrines and opinions respecting the details of church polity. And as to variety in such matters, though it were desirable, certainly there is no prospect of its vanishing, at least until some time come when the Christian mind shall be under influences altogether different from those by which the human mind is now guided. Say that at the present moment we are more enlightened, better ac-

quainted with scripture, than any who have gone before us, and more deeply sensible of the evils of schism, and as anxious as Charlemagne or Hildebrande, for an universal uniformity in the church, still how could such a thing possibly be accomplished? Were all the best qualified in Europe to engage in the attempt, each by himself, to construct from history, reason, and scripture, what he conceived to be the true creed, ritual, and polity of the church, should we not obtain just as many forms of these things as exist already, nay, as many perhaps as there were of persons who engaged in the work. And if this would inevitably be the result, were all who were deemed qualified actually to engage in the work, should we come nearer our object by forbidding all but one, who should be appointed the oracle of all? When he brought his views to light, would all acquiesce, would all adopt his digest as their confession? Certainly not. This is what has been tried in the papacy. But though supplemented by the most ingenious and serviceable fictions of infallibility and private traditions, that system only held some sort of credit with the multitude during the middle ages. It could not bear the light. It could not supply the wants of individual souls. It could not build up individual consciences. It could neither lead individuals to Christ, nor could it keep them in the faith. If there ought to be such a work as the Decrees of the Council of Trent, where all is defined, all fixed, and every variation, to which private Christians had shewn a tendency up to that date, anathematized, why is the Bible so different from it? Even the catechism of that Council is fully as large as a Bible. But the size is all wherein they agree. In feeling how different! Who ever heard of a soul being converted by reading the catechism of the Council of Trent? How cold, how dry, how unedifying, how disgusting its dogmatic strut compared with the variety,

the unction, the flow of the Bible! And so it must be more or less with every human production, which attempts to force on all men who love Christ, an universal uniformity. Such an idea is contrary to reason, and the very nature of the human mind. The mind is not a subject to which force can be applied. Force can only make hypocrites at best. Persuasion is the only appliance to which human spontaneity will yield. And every man, as to many points, has always more persuasive power over himself than any other that can address him.

All things considered, it is not conceivable that, in reference to the whole of what one holds and believes on the subject of religion, even any two men can be wholly agreed. Nor is it discoverable how this variety in religious opinion could be prevented in different individuals, or even in the same individual, in two successive years or epochs of his existence. In order to perfect agreement, it would be necessary that all men should be similarly constituted in thought and feeling, and that a man, after having once learned and apprehended his creed, should make no farther progress in religious knowledge.

It is, indeed, easy to conceive that an individual should judge it most wise "to have much that he believes to himself before God," and to refrain from uttering or committing to paper all that he holds to be true. And it is equally easy to conceive that churches in the future should avoid the publication of their special creeds likewise; corresponding to which likelihood, it is pleasing to reflect, that, as error vanishes and love increases, and those varieties in religious opinion which goodness does not prevent are more distinctly seen to be embraced by the unity of the faith, the necessity for stated creeds will vanish too.

But though there were no creeds, it would not be possible to prevent the individuals who constitute unarticled

churches from forming private creeds each man for himself. For if a man has received anyhow any religious knowledge at all, it belongs to the very nature of the intellectual principle to digest that knowledge (for it ever must digest all knowledge whatever) into some sort of system. This is the condition under which the intellectual principle acts. All variety of knowledge existing in the human mind does ever tend to resolve itself into an unity. Every fact or idea, as often as it is called up into the presence of the mind, ever tends to link itself to some other fact or idea, until the whole group of ideas which constitute the mind's knowledge of that subject thus grow into one. And hence, every man who has any knowledge of religion, and any intellectual power along with it, must, even in spite of himself, have his own opinions. But, in such circumstances, are we to expect that each man's opinions, thus truly his own, will be similar to those of every other man, equally truly his own? On the contrary, it is not more certain that all agree in this necessity of digesting a variety of miscellaneous ideas on any subject into a connected system of thought, than that almost every man differs from every other man in his means of doing so, and consequently in his success, and consequently in his results, in other words, in his opinions.

Nor is it only in intellectual power, or power of digesting ideas, that men differ from each other; they differ also remarkably in temperament and sensibility. And, from this fact in the constitution of the human species, it must happen that every man's opinions in religion, besides being a more or less accurate digest of his religious knowledge, must also be tinged with the peculiarities of his own character. In one man, for instance, whose temperament consists in the influence of extreme sensibility, affection, admiration, yieldingness, his personal creed

will be dilated beyond measure in that part which relates to the love of God. In another, on the contrary, who possesses an authoritative nature, and a severe demand for justice, his personal creed will be dilated beyond measure in that part which relates to the sovereignty and justice of God.

But, farther, though the intellectual powers and temperaments of all men were similar, still each man's opinions would be more or less different from those of every other man, as often as there was a difference either in the quantity or the quality of the materials on which each mind worked, and of which his opinions were the digest. Add to this the limited capacity of the human mind, even when assisted to the utmost by Divine grace, for retaining facts, and still more for viewing them simultaneously, and for assigning to each its relative importance, and it cannot but be perceived that each thinking man must have opinions of his own. It belongs to the very nature of the human mind to give rise to private opinions. Such a result is necessary; nor can it be prevented any how. Let us withhold the Bible, and forbid all private inquiry and speculation on the subject of religion, as the Church of Rome does, what is the result? Why, by so doing, we just throw every quick mind upon its own fancy for its faith, and force it to create, out of its own conceits, errors instead of the truths which ought to have been derived from the word of God and the converse of the pious. That this is really the case in the Church of Rome, is easily to be discovered. Let any one who enjoys the confidence of uneducated Roman Catholics mark their discourse on religion, he will soon discover that all their ideas on this subject, beyond the questions and answers of their little catechisms, is a mere dream.

But while it thus belongs to the very conditions on which opinions exist to produce variety in them, it be-

longs also to these conditions to produce unity in that variety, in such a case as that now considered. For not only are the laws of reason the same in all, but, on such a subject as religion, the subject-matter, the primary truths, are the same to all. For all equally refer to the word of God as their guide and standard of appeal. We are, therefore, plainly to expect an unity as well as variety among the opinions of the pious. And it may be safely said, that what exists in the church, in the action and reaction between the word of God and the individual soul, is a spiritual appliance, not for producing an absolute uniformity in the universal creed, or an abstract, ideal, unapplied faith, but, on the contrary, an unity of faith in variety of terms,—an unity of faith in personal application to different tones of intellect and sensibility,—such a particularised form of the faith, in short, as may suit each individual case, and lead each man who is under its influence, whatever his abilities or peculiarities, to seek the glory of God and a holy life as the chief end of his being.

Nor let it be supposed that the truth is incapable of being clothed in this variety of forms, or of adapting itself to so many appliances. Every time that truth emanates from the mind of God and assumes a place in the mind of man, it naturally and necessarily undergoes a change. God sees all truth exactly as it is with all its circumstances around it. But God alone does so. Who of men will say that he sees any thing just as God sees it? The very thought is impious, and the scriptures assure us of the contrary. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."* "We know in part, and we prophesy in part." "We see

* Isaiah lv. 8.

as through a glass darkly."* There are certain classes of truths, indeed, which we cannot conceive to be different either in themselves or in the eye of God from what we perceive them to be. But there are other truths which, in becoming clothed in the language of men, and in penetrating to our minds, unavoidably become tinged with some particular colour—tinged with something foreign (viewed as truths in the abstract), though not inconsistent with them as truths, nay, even proper and necessary to them as truths designed to affect and influence us. "As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so it is with the word of God that goeth forth from His mouth;" it does not merely echo through the world in a form comprehensible only to the Infinite, and return to Him void. It addresses the heart of man and embraces it. It clothes itself in that language and those feelings which the heart of man can respond to, and appears in the presence of the heart in the forms which the heart loves. And thus it awakes, converts, delights. And thus the people of God,—animated by His word in their hearts, as the bud is by the heaven-descended rain,—the believing people go out with joy and are led forth with peace. All the creation appears to them to breathe of the God who made it. "The mountains and the hills break forth before them into singing, and all the trees of the field clap their hands."†

To illustrate this subject a little farther, we may say that the absolute truth (truth as it exists in the mind of God), when it leaves the Divine mind and enters the mind of the finite creature, undergoes a dispersion which may be compared to that which a sunbeam undergoes when it enters a refractive medium, as, for instance, a

* 1 Cor. xiii. 3. † Isaiah lv. 12.

rain-cloud. As a sunbeam in these circumstances loses its absolute whiteness and invisibility, and is decomposed into an all but infinite variety of beautiful tints and forms of light, which the eye of man delights to contemplate, so the absolute truth, the truth as existing in the Divine Intellect (into which all its circumstances and relations enter), when it penetrates such a medium as the minds of finite creatures, is decomposed into an all but infinite variety of shades or forms of truth. As in the refracting medium on which the white light falls, there is one ray which is red, another yellow, another green, another blue, another violet, so the absolute truth, as it is in God, when it is incident upon the minds of different men, becomes tinted, and is as it were red to one, yellow to another, and of another tint to a third. It is still the truth. It is still light, but it is not the light inaccessible of the dwelling-place of the Invisible. It is the light bent and suited to the vision of the creature whom it is designed to illuminate and conduct to holiness and happiness.

But let us not dwell on this conceit too long. And to conclude, let us state, as the sum of all that has been advanced on this subject, that unity of spirit in variety of form, is the only condition under which speculative truth can exist in the minds of a variety of men. No one thing, stated in the same terms, will prove equally affecting to all. When men are seeking the supply of what they feel to be the wants of their souls, they will ever associate themselves, in various groups, around the system of things or ministry which affects them most. Nothing but force, or a divine millennial consent, could ever establish or maintain an uniformity over all. And though it were lawful in the Christian economy to use force (which it is not), and though a force adequate to the effect could be found, still the uniformity forced on, could be impressed on the

mere surface only. In the intimacies of hearts, there would still be as much variety as ever. Since, then, this variety must be in the inner man, why not suffer it to express itself outwardly? Better even discord than hypocrisy. But why either? Let but all evangelical communions now existing, cultivate the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace, and the church will in due time be visibly one. God's own love will in due time shine forth visibly on all his children, and the wants of every soul that is seeking salvation will be satisfied with truth.

CONCLUSION.

I have now presented my subject under so many aspects, and still confined myself so exclusively to one theme, that I fear the reader may be already weary of a seeming iteration. Here, therefore, let us conclude, resuming, in one word, that the object of this work has been to endeavour to shew, that, WHERE WE DISAGREE, WE WILL BEST ARRIVE AT TRUTH THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF LOVE; and that, where there is a want of a proper understanding between different evangelical churches, they will soonest arrive at a true assimilation and uniformity, by mutual recognition and esteem, and by cherishing an unity of spirit in variety of outward form, in the mean time.

There is a marked difference between a church expanding and changing from day to day, such as that which now exists, and a church fully expanded and assimilated in spiritual condition all over. And I request the reader always to keep in mind that it is to the former only—the actual church—which the arguments of this work apply. Would that I could assure him also that it is the love of

the truth which has led me to ascribe to it less exclusiveness than is usually thought to belong to it. Would that I could assure him, that within the unity of the faith and of evangelical piety, and the embrace of true religion, there may be a variety of opinions, not adverse, but highly favourable to the development of man as the child of God, an intellectual, a moral and religious being—a variety of *good opinions*, all equally to be ascribed to the influence of the same Spirit, breathing with equal kindness upon many souls, all of which are turned towards Him, but with various tastes and capacities. There may be a variety of good opinions; for they all may be true,—they all may be but views on different aspects of that one column of truth on which the universe is established,—which one man is given to see on one side, another on another, but no one man to view all round, and from base to capital. Very many, and very varied, indeed, are those that are born of the Spirit,—patriarchs, infants, sages, savages, ancients, moderns,—the children of the east and the children of the west, the children of the north and of the south. There are amongst them many of every tribe, and kindred, and tongue. The elect represent the whole of redeemed humanity in all its features. Shall we expect, then, that where there are so many varied cords to vibrate in response to the one Spirit which breathes upon them, all shall sound in perfect unison? Nay, from such a many-stringed instrument unison were a perfect miracle. But who will insist on unison, while he may have harmony? Unison may be ever sweet in heaven, but to all, save the wholly reposing ear, it soon proves itself to be too monotonous. It never developes itself; and therefore the embodied soul, ever trying to expand, soon feels constrained and suppressed, if no other food but unison, however sweet, be given to it. But let

harmony arise, let some new influence come over the melodiously sounding strings,—a new breath of air, for instance, on an Eolian harp,—and let this new influence, softly, as if by the awakening of the spirit of harmony within, cause one new accord, and then another, and then another, to arise out of the unison in which they all were sleeping at first, until the music of the instrument has expanded into a softly sounding peal of rich and varied harmony,—then, how sweetly does the listening ear watch the gentle spirit-like stirring among the strings, and respond to the dreamy strains that are awoke in beautiful succession! How fondly does it bless the gentle breeze which gave such pleasing variety as it passed along! And if it fall, so that the sweet strains die away, and nothing but the first monotone is heard again, how sad does the then dejected ear become!—how anxious for another breeze! And when another breeze does come, and out of the deep unison which alone survived the interval, each new note arises, in sweet harmony, how delighted does the soul become in catching the changeful notes which begin to chase each other again, with emulous sweetness! Unison is the basis of the whole. But yet the unison does not satisfy the embodied soul like the harmony which arises out of it. The unity does not satisfy the soul without the variety. Unison is more like a sound of death than of life. And what makes the new accords so pleasing, when they arise, is the idea of an awakening to life which they convey.

Now in the visible church, as at present constituted, we have an instrument resembling an Eolian harp. Unison and universal uniformity prevailed long ago when all was in the obstruction of death, as all was in the middle ages. But the Reformation was a time of revival. And when the church was receiving the new life which it gave,

the previous uniformity sunk. One truth rose to prominence here, another there. One evangelical church witnessed for one great principle, another for another; and no one church witnessed for all that ought to be. No one was so highly favoured above all the rest. And thus it must be, so long as the church expands and receives its new impulses by the method of *particular revivals*. The first free movement of life, in any individual church, must destroy monotony. But if it be a movement of the Spirit, it will give not discord, but harmony—harmony in which truth is always the dominant—and such a harmony is that which ought to be, and might be in the evangelical churches immediately, if all Christians would but feel towards each other as Christians. There is the same key-note of truth in every soul, though the chant of different hearts may express itself in varied phrases. All are attuned by the Redeemer to the same salvation. There is the same Spirit breathing upon all, and making all to respond. And let but the medium, in which all move, be made kindly to harmonize—let but a medium of mutual sympathy and love reach between soul and soul, while all look stedfastly to Jesus, and forthwith there will ascend from the church into the heavens, a sweetly-pealing harmony that will give joy to the angels, and glory to God in the highest. And peace upon earth and good will towards men being seen to reign in the bosom of Christians and of the church, the world will be forced to say that God is among us, indeed; and there will be added to the church daily, again, as there was in the primitive church, when all were of one accord, multitudes of men and women of such as shall be saved. Infidelity will lose its power to seduce the world from true religion. Popery will crumble like an old uninhabitable house, and Christian liberty and purity of faith will rise upon its ruins.

All that we now deplore will vanish away, and there will be universal peace and joy. The church will be adorned as the bride for the bridegroom. The bridegroom will come. The church will enter on the millennium.

And then that outward uniformity over all, which so many are vainly demanding now, will be granted, because it will be suitable to the then universally assimilated and crowned church. Varied appliances will not then be needed; for then

> "They shall teach no more
> Every man his neighbour, and every man his brother,
> Saying, Know THE LORD;
> For they shall all know Me,
> From the least of them to the greatest of them,
> Saith THE LORD."
>
> JEREMIAH XXXI. 34.

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